**Universidade de Aveiro** Departamento de Línguas e Culturas
**2004**

**Mark William Poole**

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Dissertação apresentada à Universidade de Aveiro para cumprimento dos requisitos necessários à obtenção do grau de Mestre em Estudos Ingleses, realizada sob a orientação científica do Prof. Dr. Anthony David Barker, Professor Associado do Departamento de Línguas e Culturas da Universidade de Aveiro.

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**resumo**

O *Film Noir* regressou como género comercialmente atraente nos últimos dez anos e na sequência do sucesso de *Pulp Fiction.* Nesta tese tentamos analisar as diferenças de estilo e de conteúdo, e as razões para estas diferenças entre a incarnação actual do *Film Noir* e a dos seus antecessores. Enquanto realizador cujos filmes até hoje apresentados contêm elementos de *Film Noir*, a obra de Christopher Nolan é contextualizada com a dos seus contemporâneos, ao mesmo tempo que se analisa igualmente o objectivo da expressão destes elementos.

**abstract**

Film noir has returned as a commercially attractive genre in the last ten years following the success of *Pulp Fiction*. This thesis discusses the differences of style and content and reasons for these differences between the present incarnation of film noir and its predecessors. As a director whose three feature films to date all contain noir elements, the work of Christopher Nolan is contextualized with that of his contemporaries while the purpose of his expression of these elements is also considered.

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# INTRODUCTION

**Who is Christopher Nolan?**

The Anglo-American[1] director Christopher Nolan has made three feature films to date: the self-financed *Following* (1998) set and made in England, the low budget American independent *Memento* (2000) and a relatively big budget Hollywood studio remake of the 1997 Norwegian original of the same name *Insomnia* (2002). The budget for each of his films is discussed further in the chapters related to the respective films. In May of 2003 the two minute fifty-five second film *Doodlebug*, dating back to the early nineties and his days as a student at University College London, was released as part of the *Cinema 16* collection, focusing on short films by British directors.

Nolan was educated in both England and America[2] and the fact that he has dual nationality suggests that he has been able to move between the two countries[3] and cultures with an understanding of both that would be difficult for a person whose identity is fixed within the cultural limits of one nationality. On the other hand, this dual nationality might also have aroused in him a sense of being an outsider, a member of both cultures but belonging to neither, leading him to be a person who prefers to distance himself from, observe and analyse his surroundings. This is something that Nolan was asked about when interviewed by Daniel Argent:

> Daniel Argent: With an American mother and British father, you've said you've spent your whole life "trying to be both." You grew up in England but spent years eight through eleven in Chicago. How did this kind of dual identity and early uprooting inform your philosophies about things like friendships and trust?
>
> Christopher Nolan: …Growing up in two countries and having parents from two countries has had me think more than I would have about notions of identity, particularly notions of how we identify ourselves in relation to other people.
>
> (*Creative Screenwriting*, 50)

The ideas of "trying to be both" and "how we identify ourselves in relation to other people", suggest that Nolan is one step removed from his surroundings, a person, who through this distance, is drawn to stand back rather than participate.

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[1] Christopher Nolan was born of July 30th 1970 to an American mother and a British father.

[2] He read English Literature at University College London, which goes some way to explaining his interest in narrative structure. It should also be noted that he has had no formal training in filmmaking.

[3] He finally moved to Los Angeles in 1997, after driving across America with his brother, Jonah; a journey which sowed the seeds of the script for *Memento* and which is described in Mottram's *The Making of Memento* (pp 160-61).

This idea of distance is certainly supported by the character types of the protagonists of the three feature films he has made to date. That is to say each of the protagonists embodies certain characteristics of the outsider type, with their age being roughly on a par with their degree of world-weariness. In this way the Young Man of *Following* believes himself to be an observer of people and therefore distant from them, a notion that, due to his inability to be either aware of or express his inexperience, is soon proven to be false. The more self-consciously experienced and older Leonard in *Memento* uses his "facts" to analyse the supposedly true circumstances of the killer he is seeking, while all the time unaware that it is not he who is in control but those who are around him. In *Insomnia* the detective Dormer, whose weariness is expressed literally in his name as well as in an ageing Al Pacino's face, is dislocated from the investigative procedures of a comfortable Los Angeles terrain to an alien Alaskan landscape and lightscape that he has no familiarity with, making him an outsider in his own country and in his own criminal investigation, yet ultimately aware of the implications of the situation he finds himself in. A more detailed description of the character type of the three protagonists will be offered in the coming chapters.

Such similarity of protagonist and Nolan's empathy with this character type is emphasised when one realises that Nolan scripted *Following* and *Memento* and worked as a script consultant on *Insomnia*, making significant changes to the character type of the central protagonist from the original. This further supports the idea that his interest in the outsider figure is a reflection of his own personality; a notion enhanced when one considers that his films are a depiction of procedural activities rather than human interaction. Nolan the filmmaker uses the procedure of the burglary and its implications in *Following* and investigative procedures in *Memento* and *Insomnia* to explore how the outsider figure establishes parameters of understanding and creates systems of meaning. Nolan's awareness of such processes and his empathy with his protagonist, in particular Leonard, is revealed in his interview with Daniel Argent:

> Daniel Argent: *Following* came out of your personal experience of being burglarised. Did you draw upon any personal experiences when writing *Memento*?
>
> Christopher Nolan: Everything really…Research gave me a grounding in memory and the way it works. Then I just looked at myself, and the way I store things in my mind. Once you start

> examining that process, you rapidly realise how inefficient that system is, and how interpretation is involved, how many different devices you use, such as notes and photographs…I realised I use habit and routine. I always keep my keys in the same pocket. I write things on my hand. *Leonard is very much an extrapolation of my own behaviour.* (My italics).
>
> (*Creative Screenwriting*, 50)

Nolan's choice of language betrays his analytical rather than emotional nature. His talk of "systems" and "processes" suggests that the detective film is a genre he is naturally drawn to. Furthermore, the outsider, or solitary male, is a stalwart of film noir, in films as diverse as *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), *Kiss Me Deadly* (1956), *Point Blank* (1967), *Chinatown* (1974), *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Fight Club* (1999) to mention one film noir from each of the last six decades. Given Nolan's identification with the outsider figure, it can be assumed that any films he makes might involve placing the outsider figure in his natural milieu: the film noir, where the solitary protagonist is at odds with his surroundings and the characters he comes into contact with and attempts to understand location, people and circumstance, just as Nolan thinks about "how we identify ourselves in relation to other people." Furthermore, the contorted narrative structure of the film noir also lends itself to Nolan's interest in how stories are transmitted and is perhaps a reflection of his former literary studies.

## **What is "Film Noir"?**

The term "film noir" is still considered problematic when used to describe its generic status, but one that Nolan and cinema critics have accepted as applicable to his work. (See footnote p.101). It is taken as a given in this thesis that the term describes a genre with clearly defined parameters within which filmmakers can address contemporary themes. The very elusiveness of the character types in film noir, the multi-layered narrative and the normally negative outcome are important factors in why critics have had problems with conferring full generic status on film noir. Stephen Neale, quoted in Rick Altman's *Film/Genre*, supports this by posing some of the difficulties:

> Stephen Neale says that "The existence of genre means that the spectator, precisely, will always know that everything will be "made right in the end", that everything will cohere, that any threat or any danger in the narrative process itself will always be contained" (1980,p.28).
>
> (Altman, 18)

It is this lack of positive closure, the slippage between characters and the fracturing of traditional narrative procedures that are some of the main defining elements of film noir. Paradoxically, film noir as a genre can be defined as such precisely because it does not comply with the definition of genre as given by Neale above. Since Nolan's films have been described as film noir, much of this thesis examines what particular aspects of Nolan's films can be described as noir and in what ways his treatment of noir tropes differs from previous and present treatments.

The term noir is frequently qualified either by the prefix "neo" or the adjective "postmodern" as a way of distinguishing contemporary noir from the so-called "classic" period. However, definitions of "neo" or "postmodern" noir are even more elusive than a definition of what the component parts of "classic" noir are. The critic Susan Hayward addresses this in relation to postmodernism:

> There appears to be no easy definition of postmodernism. Indeed there are many different ways in which it is perceived.
>
> (Hayward, 274)

This thesis, rather than adopting labels such as "classic noir", "neo-noir" and "postmodern noir", proposes that there are three periods in the last sixty years of American filmmaking when film noir has been to the fore in addressing contemporary issues. These three cycles, as they are henceforth called, run respectively from 1941 to 1958, 1967 to 1981 and finally 1992 to the present date. The conditions and defining elements of these cycles are discussed in chapter one.

However, certain aspects of Nolan's films can be discussed under the term "postmodern". His interest in placing his protagonists in situations where technology is either rejected (*Following*, *Memento*) or not available (*Insomnia*) could be said to be part of a postmodern distrust of the benefits of technological development. A notion that Hayward confirms:

> Postmodernism reacts against modernism's optimistic belief in the benefits of science and technology.
>
> (Hayward, 275)

This aspect of Nolan's work is explored particularly in the chapters on *Memento* and *Insomnia* but it should be remembered that Nolan himself has made no reference that I am aware of to any postmodern agenda in his work.

Film noir, as will be argued in chapter one, is of all genres the one that is the most interested in the psychology of the protagonist. The psychological aspect most commonly focused on is paranoia. Furthermore, distorted camera angles that suggest the camera as character and narrative strategies such as the voiceover and flashback lend themselves perfectly to both building up a paranoid psychological profile of the protagonist and creating narratives that depict this profile. How each cycle uses the voiceover and flashback will be further examined in chapter one. Each of the cycles of film noir has a different psychological focus, depending on the cultural/political issues of the day, as I will show in chapter one. Film noir as a consistent genre is further defined as one in which psychological aspects of the usually male protagonist are explored and attempts are made, as is not the case in the still present classic Hollywood production, to offer the spectator alternative narrative structures that implicate the viewer more profoundly in protagonist identification and the viewing process. This is discussed in more depth in the chapters concerning *Memento* and *Insomnia*.

## The Origins and Writing of the Term "Film Noir"

When writing in his article "The Evolution of The Crime Film" about the success of what he describes as the crime film, Claude Chabrol's first line was:

> Success creates fashion, which defines genre.
>
> (Chabrol, 25)

While Chabrol is reducing the process of genre creation to a simplistic maxim, his process of defining what we know as film noir clarifies as a genre that which academics and critics have been arguing about for the past fifty years or more. The origin of the term "film noir" is usually accredited to Jean-Paul Chartier and the title of his article of 1946, "Americans also make *Noir* Films." However, what is occasionally overlooked is the fact that the term came from a mutation of the French *roman noir* stories, which

was the series title for the translations of the stories of Dashiell Hammett, James M. Cain and Raymond Chandler, when they were published in France in the thirties. This mutation of *roman noir* to film noir was used to describe how the atmosphere of the literary originals had been transferred to the screen in the wartime movies that the French were unable to see until after the Second World War.

That the French critic Nino Frank could identify in his essay " A New Kind of Police Drama: the Criminal Adventure", originally published in the same year as Chartier's essay, four films, *Double Indemnity* (1944), *The Maltese Falcon*, *Murder My Sweet* (a.k.a. *Farewell my Lovely*) (1944) and *Laura* (1944) as being film noir shows that his understanding of this type of film was prescient. That three of the four (*Laura* being the exception) use Hammett, Cain and Chandler as either source material or scriptwriters[4] suggests that the influence of these three writers on the 1st cycle of film noir, and as a consequence the tone of the 2nd and 3rd cycles, cannot be underestimated.

This issue of what film noir is, is not simply a matter of establishing the parameters by which any film can be described or defined as noir. It is also a question of the way in which the term is written. The commonly accepted practice is to write the term in italics but this italicising has the effect of distancing the term from the English language. While the term is probably italicised because it is a French term introduced into the English language, the italics keep the term and as a result, the genre it signifies at arm's length as if it has yet to reach full generic status. Altman is aware of the effect of presentation in designating generic status:

> Duane's removal of the quotation marks from the expression "woman's film" is apparently justified by her acceptance of the woman's film as a fully-fledged genre.
>
> (Altman, 75)

While the type of punctuation is different, the effect is similar: to distance the writer, and as a result the reader, from the term and leave it as a self-conscious referent. It is because I accept the full generic status of film noir that neither italics nor inverted commas will be used in this thesis to qualify the term film noir, unless it is to conform

[4] Chandler co-scripted *Double Indemnity* with Billy Wilder.

to the conventions of academic writing in the stating of names of books or essays where inverted commas or italics have been used by others.

**Thesis Organisation**

The thesis begins with a chapter that places Christopher Nolan's work in the broader historical context of the three cycles of film noir by examining the socio-political origins of film noir in its 1st cycle. It will then be suggested that films from the 1st cycle of film noir reflect the specific set of technological developments and socio-political events that Hollywood and America experienced in the late forties/early fifties. The reasons for its fall from popularity in the mid to late fifties are also examined.

The chapter continues with a discussion concerning the re-emergence of film noir in the late sixties/early seventies and reasons for that re-emergence will be put forward. It will also be suggested that the film noir of the 2nd cycle were, with a number of notable exceptions, self-conscious versions of the 1st cycle of film noir that offered little in the way of a critique of contemporary events and attitudes while I shall be giving reasons why directors of the time, generally-speaking, were affected by this self-consciousness when making film noir.

This will be followed by an examination of the technological developments over the past twenty years and how these have influenced the ways in which films are experienced. This is followed by a discussion of how these technological developments have affected the way in which narrative is presented in the 3rd cycle of film noir and what issues contemporary noir filmmakers are addressing in their films and what, if any, differences there are between 1st and 3rd cycle noir subject matter.

The chapter concludes by contextualising Nolan's work with that of his contemporaries and discussing similarities and differences in approach to modern film noir making. This final section also examines some of the concerns and apparent contradictions as expressed by these filmmakers.

The three chapters which follow involve an analysis of the three feature films directed by Nolan and the short *Doodlebug*. Each chapter looks at elements of his trajectory

towards the studios of Hollywood from his early, self-financed, filmmaking days in England onwards. The noir tropes present within each of the three films will also be discussed in the relevant chapters, while attempting to place the film under discussion in the context of wider contemporary noir filmmaking. In addition, I will comment on similarities and differences between the film under discussion and films from the previous cycles of noir. Each of the films will be examined in the order they were made, firstly because this approach traces what might be described as artistic progression and secondly because the exponential increase in budget already referred to will inevitably lead to significant changes in Nolan's working practices and an increased sophistication in the ways in which he can express his vision and concerns.

More specifically, chapter two firstly examines *Doodlebug* as a prototype for the thematic and technical concerns that Nolan develops in his later films. This section also considers how far Nolan's interest in the technical aspects of filmmaking suggests that he is a director interested in formalist issues. It also considers how Nolan has assembled a team of creative influences around him that are capable of transferring his ideas to the screen. The chapter then continues with an examination of *Following*, Nolan's first, self-financed, feature film and looks at Nolan's directorial autonomy as well as his involvement in all aspects of production. The chapter continues with a discussion of how far a film like *Following* can be considered independent of mainstream Hollywood material and generic expectations. Since the film is noir in influence and outlook, this chapter also examines the basic narrative tropes of noir, how they are expressed in this film and how they are developed in his later films. There is also a discussion of how the theme of paranoia is addressed in this film and the implications of this depiction for a wider social context.

*Memento*, Nolan's next feature is discussed in chapter three. This chapter's main concern is an examination of Nolan's use of the fractured narrative and the way in which he uses this and other generic expectations to make the spectator empathise with the Leonard's state of mind. This, it is argued, is done to force the spectator to question not just the veracity of the filmic narrator but also our own perceptions and memories of the events depicted. This is followed by a discussion of the influence of multi-media in modern filmmaking, with a proposal that this influence is changing the way in which

stories are told and films perceived. The chapter concludes with an examination of the potential metaphorical meanings of the film and the way in which we receive information, while suggesting that Leonard's condition as presented in the film is a postmodern, anti-technological approach to perceiving the world.

Nolan's last film to date, *Insomnia,* is his first film to involve a big budget by his standards and is his first studio film. The implications of this are examined in chapter four as well as how Nolan uses the star personae of Al Pacino and Robin Williams to subvert conventional notions of the star in feature films and how this subversion can also be used to examine the changing role of the male in modern society. The chapter then compares and contrasts Nolan's *Insomnia* with the Norwegian original, discussing changes that have been made at both script and visual level and proposing reasons for those changes. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the elements that can be considered to be typical of Nolan in his filming of space and time in his three feature films, while also suggesting that his filming of these dimensions is a reflection of the way in which the world is experienced in the 21st century.

The thesis concludes with a brief discussion of Nolan's work to date, bringing together the underlying themes of the three feature films and their implications as far as the spectator and noir are concerned. The conclusion also examines his working practices, his tendency to remain faithful to people who understand his working practices and discusses whether Nolan is a filmmaker of formalist or humanist concerns. This final chapter also looks at how Nolan's next projected feature, provisionally entitled *Batman: Intimidation*, and due for release in 2005, while his biggest film to date in terms of budget, could be read as a natural, if somewhat unlikely progression, thematically, of the films he has already made. Finally some areas for future research are indicated, including a more thorough examination of the three cycles of film noir, similarities and differences between the cycles and how outdated tropes are readdressed in contemporary film noir.

# CHAPTER ONE – NOLAN AND THE TRADITION OF NOIR

Before an analysis of each of Nolan's film's can be made in their respective chapters, his work should be contextualized in terms of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd cycles of film noir by giving a socio-political background to the three cycles and discussing the similarities and differences between the conventions of each of the three cycles.

Once an overview of the socio-historical background to film noir has been accomplished it will be possible to examine such conventions as the voiceover, flashback, location, the *femme fatale* etc. in terms of how such conventions have traditionally been used in film noir and how Nolan and other contemporary directors are adapting these conventions today. The chapter ends with a brief discussion of some of the apparent contradictions in Nolan and other contemporary noir filmmakers' stated aims and the work they actually produce, as well as some thoughts on the future of noir.

## 1st Cycle Noir

The success of the gangster films of the early thirties was a result of the rise of the real-life gangster in 1920s prohibition America, the public's fascination with them and Hollywood's willingness to supply a product that satisfied its audience's desires. While changes in the law meant that Prohibition became an historical rather than contemporary issue and the increasing influence of the Production Code Administration (PCA) meant that filmmakers could no longer glamorise what the screenwriter Ben Hecht described as "villains and bawds"[5], this still left the audience with an appetite for crime movies to be satisfied. The early film noirs of the 1st cycle were thus a response by filmmakers to this perceived need.

What must be stated at the outset is that filmmakers like Wilder, Preminger, Huston, Lang and Garnett were not making film noir, since the term itself had not yet come into use[6]. By feeding the audience's desire for crime films they were working within and

[5] As quoted in Philip French's essay "Kings of the Underworld", published in *Movies of the Thirties* p. 38.
[6] See introduction for discussion of the origin of the term film noir.

reacting to a specific set of conditions that are described below, as well as using the improving technology, in terms of film stock and lighting, of the late thirties/early forties to make the films that would later be identified as film noir.

Contemporary audiences are still attracted to the modern day counterpart of the gangster movie. In the current climate the influence of the gangster movie can be seen, in the American market, in films about the Mafia, such as *The Godfather* trilogy (1972,1974,1990) and the Mob films of Scorsese, while English interest in the gangster, or the English version of it, can be seen in films like *Get Carter* (1971), *The Long Good Friday* (1980) up to the current trend with Guy Ritchie's films *Lock Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* (1998) and *Snatch* (2000). By setting *Following* in the underworld of London and using a gangster backdrop of revenge killings, Nolan is taking advantage of the fascination that audiences have had for the gangster milieu to create noir tales in the tradition of 40s noir. This is further examined in the chapter concerning *Following*.

While the influence of German expressionism and psychology and French existentialist thinking is well-documented[7] in the film noir of the forties and fifties, the effects of the Depression, the Second World War and changes to the production code should also not be overlooked. The socio-political climate of America in the thirties meant that filmmakers were encouraged to make films that distracted rather than questioned and entertained rather than enlightened. The successful gangster figure was thus a figure of escape for moviegoers in the thirties, a figure that spoke of opportunism in a depressed climate. David Robinson attests to this in his introduction to *Movies of the Thirties*:

> Filmmakers it seemed, in whatever country, saw their role as heroic fiddlers, to provide a diversion from a reality that was crowding in too close. In the United States, out of the thousands of films made during the decade, not a dozen so much as touched upon the Depression, the Spanish Civil War or any of the cataclysmic developments in Europe.
>
> (Robinson, 7)

The Second World War brought still further need to make films that promoted patriotism and "blunted the fledgling moves toward a dark cinema" (Shrader, 54).

[7] Cf. Paul Shrader "Notes of Film Noir", pp56/7, David Oberbey "*In The Shadows*", p.141/2, Jane Root "Film Noir", p.185.

However, with the end of the Second World War and the post war economic boom the hangover of the Depression could be fully explored in films, as Shrader points out:

> The acute downer which hit the U.S. after the Second World War was, in fact, a delayed reaction to the thirties… The disillusionment many soldiers, small businessmen and housewife/factory employees felt in returning to a peacetime economy was directly mirrored in the sordidness of the urban crime film.
>
> (Shrader, 54/5)

In conjunction with this trend for thirties filmmakers to make films that offered escapism from the Depression was the PCA under the directorship of the moral reformer Joseph Breen, who could affirm in 1937 as a positive state of affairs that there was:

> A definite trend away from serious drama… No indication, anywhere, of any plans to produce pictures dealing with… social or sociological questions.
>
> (Black, 118)

It cannot be denied that the strength of the PCA in the 1930s went a long way towards restricting and influencing what could and could not be filmed and this attitude informs the earlier comments of both Robinson and Shrader concerning the socio-political situation of the Thirties. The power of the PCA was something that contemporary critics were also aware of. The French critic Jean Pierre Chartier, writing in 1946, commented:

> We understand why the Hays Office had previously forbidden film adaptations of James M. Cain's two novels from which *Double Indemnity* and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* are drawn. It is harder to understand, given this censor's moral posture, why this interdiction was lifted, as it is hard to imagine story lines with a more pessimistic or disgusted point of view regarding human behaviour.
>
> (Chartier, 21)

This point of view should be considered in conjunction with Black's comment in his essay:

> It seems clear that the goal of the PCA was to have each film clearly identify evil, make sin and crime appear as deviant behaviour, have strong character "stars" play roles representing good, and dilute political and social comment.
>
> (Black, 119)

If we bear this in mind when considering the two films Chartier was referring to, then it can be seen that both *Double Indemnity* and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946) offer a clear message that transgressions from social norms are punished (in both cases) by the death of all the protagonists who transgress, where the figure of temptation is clearly positioned in the female and thus a reflection of the male's fears of desire and attraction.

That, in these two films, both Barbara Stanwyck and Lana Turner were significantly bigger stars than their male counterparts also attests to their distance as star personae from the male spectator; they may sleep with nobodies in the films, but this transgression is actually a warning to the spectator not to fantasise. Their availability in the films actually highlights their distance in real life. Furthermore, their deaths could also be said to act as a warning to the female spectator not to transgress from the path of convention, since the reward for ambition and transgression outside wedlock is cinematic death.

What was a challenge to the noir filmmaker of the forties and fifties was to find ways of subverting the aims of the PCA and coming up with suitable images that worked on a metaphoric level to depict the sexual attraction that was at the heart of the relationship between the male and female protagonists. *Double Indemnity* achieves this at the level of script, with the early exchanges between Neff and Dietrichson expressing their attraction, whereas *The Postman Always Rings Twice* achieves this at the level of image where midnight swims become a metaphor for sexual intercourse. Noir filmmakers sought metaphorical methods of depicting material that the PCA would otherwise find unsuitable and thus escaped the sanction of censorship. It was another thirty-five years before each film was remade to reflect the more graphic and adult content of the literary originals. How effective these remakes were will be examined later in this chapter.

As the socio-political landscape of post-war America shifted to the increased consumerism and an easing of paranoia in the late fifties, so noir found itself out of step with current trends. Furthermore, the increased use of colour film stock as a way of tempting audiences away from their suburban televisions meant that much of the aesthetics of noir were, if not exactly unfashionable, then at least too black and white for the Technicolor world the Americans believed they were creating. Schrader attests to as much:

> At the rise of McCarthy and Eisenhower demonstrated, Americans were eager to see a more bourgeois view of themselves. Crime had to move to the suburbs. The criminal put on a gray flannel suit and the footsore cop was replaced by the "mobile unit" careening down the expressway. Any attempt at social criticism had to be cloaked in ludicrous affirmations of the American way of life. Technically, television, with its demand for full lighting and close-ups, gradually undercut the German influence, and color cinematography was, of course, the final blow to the "noir" look.
>
> (Schrader, 61)

However, when the ratings system was introduced in 1966 and the need for metaphorical methods of depicting, specifically sexual, material that would have previously been considered unsuitable was removed, filmmakers were faced with a new dilemma. While the very restrictions that the 1st cycle of film noir suffered from contributed to the mood and creativity of the pieces, such constraints were not in place in the early seventies. By having the injunction removed filmmakers were left with trying to find new ways of expressing noir concerns and taboos and to start with the results were overly self-conscious reflections of noir tropes.

## 2nd Cycle Noir

> Thirty-three years ago, after making his cinematic debut with a small-scale black-and-white movie in Britain, John Boorman went to the States and became a world figure overnight, directing Lee Marvin in *Point Blank*, a very European treatment of an archetypal American subject. The 29-year-old Christopher Nolan has done something similar.
>
> (Philip French, *The Observer*, 22nd October 2000)

*Point Blank* (1967) is significant not just because it demonstrates the first steps towards creating film noir for modern audiences but also because it, whether by accident[8] or design, is clearly an influence on Nolan's *Memento* and indeed *Insomnia*[9]. Its structure of repeated and alternative scenes, non-chronological narrative without the necessary cues of voiceover, fades or dissolves to orientate the spectator within the narrative framework can be seen to be a precursor of the same techniques Nolan has used in *Memento*. Thematically, the revenge motif is one that is shared by both films while each seeks to question the function of memory in the spectator and the notion of memory itself through the extended use of the fractured narrative. This is discussed further in the chapter on *Memento*.

*Point Blank* is further significant because it takes one of the archetypal heavies, Lee Marvin, from the 1st cycle of film noir and reinvents him. This is significant for two reasons. Firstly, as David Thomson has noted:

> Marvin's career is central to the role of violence in the American cinema. It might be said that he moved from the irrational, unprincipled killer to the outsider figure in *Point Blank* who is as lethal as the criminal structure of society compels him to be.
>
> (Thomson, 569)

Paradoxically, from being a supporting actor in the 1st cycle of noir, most significantly in *The Big Heat* (1953), Marvin takes centre stage as an outsider in this precursor of 3rd cycle noir. Furthermore, by taking one of the stars associated with the 1st cycle of film noir, Boorman is establishing temporal generic links. This is something that Edward Gallafent has commented on:

> But alongside … is another frequent device: the casting of actors who are associated with earlier Hollywood production, and sometimes specifically with film noir, as in the use of Robert Mitchum, at that time in his late fifties, as Philip Marlowe in *Farewell, My Lovely*.
>
> (Gallafent, 254)

[8] In James Mottram's *Making Of Memento*, Nolan claims not to have seen *Point Blank*.

[9] While the similarities between *Point Blank* and *Memento* are far greater, there is one key similarity between *Point Blank* and *Insomnia*. This involves the repeated setting in each film of a scene on a ferry that, in both films, involves the first meeting of the two main male protagonists. Furthermore, the camerawork in this scene, where the protagonists fill the screen as if to suggest a battle of wills, is also very similar in both films. This in turn would suggest that Nolan had seen the film between French's piece in *The Observer* and the making of *Insomnia*. (See page 123).

A much more effective use of icons from the 1st cycle of film noir can be seen in *Chinatown* (1974), where the casting of John Huston, a director from the 1st cycle of film noir, in an acting role ensures that a link is created between the 1st cycle of noir and the noir of the Seventies.

In the early seventies, another way of addressing noir concerns and ensuring that the contemporary audience recognised them as noir concerns, was to set films in the classic period of noir, i.e. the forties, which can be seen in films like *Chinatown* and *Farewell, My Lovely* (1975). Or conversely the filmmaker could transport detective figures of the thirties and forties to seventies California as in *The Long Goodbye* (1973) and the eponymous *Marlowe* (1969). Gallafent, in relation to these four films, goes so far as to suggest:

> One might say… that we are being presented with a new film of this world, a film made in the awareness that the audience has seen 'forties film noir and is now being presented with something "improved", which allows it to be seen more clearly or completely.
>
> (Gallafent, 254)

While it has to be agreed that the term film noir was gaining currency in early seventies'[10] critical circles and that contemporary audiences were sophisticated enough to be able to identify film noir as such, it has to be questioned whether the film noir of the early seventies offered a clearer or "improved" view of the contemporary America, since one of the central tenets of film noir is the corruption of the individual or society and corruption itself can never be seen clearly due to insidious, corrosive nature.

[10] The term "film noir", even though the French had been using the term for twenty years or so, was only just coming into acceptance at the beginning of the seventies in America, as Alain Silver in his introduction to *Film Noir Reader* points out:

> Ironically, American writers did not immediately take up consideration of this indigenous phenomenon (film noir) and the question of its "essential traits." Only gradually in a frequently cross-referenced series of essays in the 1970s did they begin to express themselves.
>
> (Silver, 3)

Rather, it is that these films reflect the political and social disturbance of late sixties and early seventies America and, therefore, have a critical agenda, whether it be *Chinatown*'s connection with Watergate or *The Long Goodbye*'s critique of the immorality of contemporary America. Therefore, rather than being an improved version of the noir of the forties, these films are a depiction of the insecurity felt in the early seventies, just as film noir of the late forties was a reflection of that period's social insecurity as referred to earlier. As Shrader has indicated:

> The fascination film noir holds for today's young filmgoers and film students reflects recent trends in American cinema: American movies are again taking a look at the underside of the American character, but compared to such relentlessly cynical films noir as *Kiss Me Deadly* or *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye*, the new self-hate cinema of *Easy Rider* and *Medium Cool* seems naïve and romantic. As the current political mood hardens, filmgoers and filmmakers will find the film noir of the late forties increasingly attractive. The Forties may be to the Seventies what the Thirties were to the Sixties.
>
> (Shrader, 53)

It is interesting that Shrader believes *Easy Rider* (1969) to be "naïve and romantic." His comments would be equally applicable to the film's best actor and his character in the more mainstream film he would make in 1974: Jack Nicholson in *Chinatown*. Bearing in mind that *Chinatown* is a seventies depiction of thirties corruption, it should be remembered that his character, Jake Gittes, is a supposedly hard-boiled detective who is in actual fact rather naïve and romantic, suggesting that the private detective figure is an outsider, with outsider here meaning out of step with his surroundings. That is to say his seventies counterpart, projected back into the thirties, is metaphorically incapable of dealing with the contemporary corruption he confronts.

Since individual corruption was at the heart of the 1st cycle of film noir this commandeering of noir in the early seventies is perhaps understandable, but forties and fifties noir was being made in the context of the political instability of the time and a very specific set of social and technological conditions which had inevitably changed by the time the films under discussion were made, and directors were uncertain how to depict these changes. Noir is therefore being used as the most appropriate genre to reflect this uncertainty and it is this self-conscious appropriation of the genre that leads most seventies noir to feel awkward.

Gallafent also suggests, quite rightly, that:

> The 'seventies film noir cycle shares with, say, the Dino De Laurentis production of *King Kong* (John Guillermin, 1976) the stress on technical improvements and on the relaxation of censorship.
>
> (Gallafent, 254)

The filmmakers of the early seventies were working in an atmosphere of burgeoning critical acceptance for film noir as a genre, increased liberalism in what material could be depicted and a society as distrustful of its politicians and businessmen as late forties America had been of the position of women in society. Just as the filmmakers of the 1st cycle of noir were not consciously making film noir, but rather reacting to popular trends and a specific set of sociological conditions, so, conversely, those filmmakers of the early seventies were taking their first tentative steps towards making what they took to be an established form, film noir, the most suitable genre to depict a particular stage of American history, while still coming to terms with those changes in society and censorship.

In certain ways, this development parallels the Lacanian stages of child development as mapped out by Madan Sarup:

> Lacan tells us that somewhere between the ages of six and eighteen months the subject arrives at an apprehension of both itself and the Other – indeed of itself as Other. This discovery is assisted by the child seeing, for the first time, its own reflection in a mirror. That reflection has a coherence which the subject itself lacks.
>
> (Sarup, 22)

Filmmakers of the seventies and indeed early eighties, having themselves grown up with and absorbed the influences of the 1st cycle of film noir, used their attempts at noir films to reflect the more liberal attitude of the late sixties. Much of the success of the 1st cycle was dependent on the very restraints under which the films were made, whereas since such restraints were not in place in the early seventies, the films can appear to be lacking in a clear artistic focus.

This notion of seventies noir being a reflection in the mirror of forties noir is particularly true of films like *Farewell My Lovely*, *The Big Sleep* (1977), *Body Heat* (1981) and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1981). All four are essentially remakes of films from the classic period (the similarities of plot between *Body Heat* and *Double Indemnity* cannot go unnoticed), two involve using Robert Mitchum to link present to past noir and the latter two use explicit sex scenes as the most telling form of updating. While the directors' intentions might have been to pay homage to the films of the forties, as Richard T. Jameson suggests:

> Too frequently nowadays, the homage serves as a means of borrowing validity for essentially invalid, half-.thought-out, insincere, and sometimes campily patronising work.
>
> (Jameson, 197)

While Jameson does not specify which films he is writing about, it could easily be at least three of the four films mentioned above, the exception being *Farewell My Lovely*. What makes his comments prescient, however, is that he was writing in 1974, a year before the first of the aforementioned films was made.

A comparison between two of the originals mentioned in the previous section, *Double Indemnity* and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* with their counterparts of the early eighties, should develop the notion put forward by Jameson. Both remakes date from 1981 and both use explicit sex scenes within the narrative. Indeed, the very title *Body Heat* is a far less oblique indicator as to content than *Double Indemnity*. This tendency towards, specifically female, nudity in film noir, while a reflection of changing attitudes and standards in American society, is incorrectly considered as the empowerment of the female. Or as Kate Stables puts it:

> With this addition of open eroticisation (woman-as-sexual-spectacle), to female glamour (woman-as-spectacle), 90s cinema rearticulates questions of knowledge and sexuality around the *fatale*. The profusion of sexual strands combined in her creation attempt to reveal the "truth" about her – and by extension the truth about woman – by laying her body bare, her carnal activities and proclivities, and her speech. Perversely, through its elaborate artifices and excess cultural baggage this wholesale sexualisation serves to render the fatale more, rather than less, opaque. The new "nude" fatale is in reality swathed (some might say disguised) by sex – the more she shows, the less we know.
>
> (Stables, 179)

While the partially naked figures of Jessica Lange in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and Sharon Stone in *Basic Instinct* (1991) might be swathed by sex, their very nakedness is pandering to the male gaze. However, the empowerment that Stone's character may or may not embody is not shared by Lange's character. The impression given, through the way the character is scripted and portrayed, is that in contrast to Stables' notion she has nothing else to show apart from her body. The scene on the kitchen table is not a scene of empowerment, but one of male domination over the female, with the spectator being implicit in this domination.

Furthermore, in contrast to the female stars who, as has been suggested, played an important part in the projection of the female in forties noir, Lange was a relative unknown, having only starred in *King Kong* (1976), (a film which reduces her to the level of plaything), while Nicholson was an acknowledged star. Thus it can be argued that the remake of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, through its use of male star persona and its explicitness, is an assertion of male strength over the female, whereas the original was an expression of male paranoia about the female and her motives. The ending of both films confirms this, with, in the original, Garfield contrite and on his way to be executed aware of the duplicity of Turner. The remake settles for a last scene that shows Nicholson, at least within the diegesis of the film, having lost Lange and, literally, having got away with murder. What we are left with, as Jameson attests to, albeit in a discussion of *Shamus* (1972), is a film where:

> …The film is consistent… flaunting its duplication of scenes and details from previous pictures, and pretending to have updated the material simply by exploiting the star's pop-certified machismo value.
>
> (Jameson, 198)

2nd cycle noir shifted the emphasis from the female star to the male star and in the process objectified the naked female body. Even a film like *Klute* (1971), which is one of the key film noir of the early seventies in its attempt to examine voyeurism in the male, does little more than use voyeurism (cf. the scene where Jane Fonda strips for the benefit of an old man)[11]. 2nd cycle noir was an attempt to depict the changing moral

[11] This is the paradox of any film that attempts to explore the voyeuristic aspects of the audience's relationship with the screen: it needs voyeuristic images with which to do this (cf. *Peeping Tom*

attitudes in American society coupled with an increasing intellectual awareness of the generic nature of the material being filmed. That, by and large, it is not as successful in its depiction as 1st cycle noir has much to do with the ways in which these attitudes are projected and the filmmakers' self-awareness about the genre they were working in.

## 3rd Cycle Noir

While late in the 3rd cycle of film noir as defined below, Steven Soderbergh's *The Limey* (1999) is a significant contribution to this thesis because it links the 2nd cycle of film noir, specifically *Point Blank*, with the work of Christopher Nolan. Its fractured narrative can be said to be derivative of the former while presaging Nolan's narrative concerns - particularly in *Memento* and *Insomnia*. Jason Wood describes the opening montage in the film, in which the narrative timeline is deconstructed into at least five reordered sections, as follows:

> It perfectly encapsulates Soderbergh's structuring of the story and the way in which the film formally represents "how the mind sifts through things" and the abstract nature of memory and imagination.
>
> (Wood, 68)

Wood also describes the film as:

> …An attempt to put the sixties in perspective, specifically the shift from optimism to disillusionment post 1967…
>
> (Wood, 67)

That *Point Blank* dates back to 1967, just as the excerpts cited in *The Limey* from Ken Loach's *Poor Cow* (1967) do, is perhaps a fortuitous coincidence, yet one which shows how influential *Point Blank* has been in film noir and that it was perhaps the first film to act as a template for 3rd cycle noir and its concern with reappraising narrative structure.

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(1959), *Vertigo* (1958), *Body Double* (1984)). Furthermore, the happy ending of *Klute* fits uncomfortably with the events that the story has portrayed. While it is an attempt at irony, it still reads as little more than traditional closure.

In terms of film noir the seventies and early eighties was a period when Hollywood became aware of its history and back catalogue and attempted to adjust to the changing social mores while, as has been suggested, self-consciously attempting to express this awareness. It was also the period when English-speaking critics came to some agreement as to what film noir was and filmmakers were becoming more capable of articulating the aesthetics and tropes of the 1st cycle of noir. Yet, despite the notable achievements of a handful of films, it was this very self-consciousness that forced film noir to creep back into the shadows for another ten years, from 1982 to 1992, just as it had done in 1958.

Furthermore, its retreat into the shadows was hastened by the fact that fewer movies were being made and those that were being made relied on bigger budgets. The success of films like *Star Wars* (1977) and *E.T.* (1982) also ensured that the moneymen in Hollywood would attempt to duplicate the success of these films rather than invest in a genre that seemed out of step with contemporary tastes. According to Sharon Y. Cobb:

> …The real revival of Noir was launched by *Chinatown* in 1974. Other films that could be called New (or Neo) Noir due to their cinematic style or content include: *Raging Bull* (1980); *Thief* (1981); *Body Heat* (1981); *Blood Simple* (1983); *Jagged Edge* (1985); *Manhunter* (1986); *Blue Velvet* (1987); *The Grifters* (1990); *Basic Instinct* (1991); *Reservoir Dogs* (1992); *Love Crimes* (1992); *Final Analysis* (1992); *Guncrazy* (1992); *Red Rock West* (1992); *Pulp Fiction* (1994); *The Last Seduction* (1994); *The Usual Suspects* (1995); *The Professional* (1994); sic. *Fargo* (1996), and *L.A. Confidential* (1997).
>
> (Cobb, 207)

While Cobb may well be indulging in the thankless, subjective task of compiling a definitive list of 2nd and 3rd cycle film noir, just as critics have tried to compile the definitive list[12] of film noir from the 1st cycle, it is interesting to note that her list includes only one film from the seventies, seven from the eighties and thirteen from the nineties up to and including 1997. If the quantity of films in her list is taken as a

[12] "Critics argue about which were the first and the last Films Noirs of the Classic Periods (*Rebecca* (1940) & *Vertigo* (1958), *Stranger on the Third Floor* (1940) & *Odds Against Tomorrow* (1957), *Citizen Kane* (1941) & *Touch of Evil* (1958) and even argue about the length of the Classic Period (1940-1960, 1945-1955), I let them argue it out an spend the time watching another Film Noir on TV." Paul Duncan writing on page 14 in *Film Noir Films of Trust and Betrayal.*

starting point, we have to ask what led to the return of noir in the early nineties. There are a number of elements that have to be taken into consideration.

Following the success of Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) and *Pulp Fiction* (1994) crime was fashionable again at least in filmic terms. This allowed those in charge in Hollywood to give permission for the making of films that attempted to replicate such success. That noir is a central aesthetic of the modern crime film has a lot to do with the narrative structure of traditional noir, with its flashbacks and temporal re-orderings within the narrative, which children of the MTV and video generation would not find difficult to follow. As will be argued, since nineties noir filmmakers were part of this generation, they could understand how films were viewed in the home environment and replicate and improve upon that experience in the films they made. It is clear that the widespread introduction of the video recorder in the eighties had led to an increase in the amount of films watched and the ways in which they were watched. Sarup comments this on:

> Video cassette recorders, for example, allow us to watch movies as we have always read books. We often interrupt our reading to deal with other things and then we return, and start a few pages before we finished reading. Sometimes we read the same page again and again. We are no longer compelled to submit to the jurisdiction of an authoritarian author or *auteur*. We may play-back or freeze the frame.
>
> (Sarup, 175)

The spectator has been empowered through the remote control to watch films when and where they wanted, repeat favourite sequences ad infinitum and use freeze frames to analyse specific images. It is inevitable that these viewing habits would eventually be fed back into the aesthetics of the big screen, as the movie-renting geeks of the eighties became the filmmakers of the nineties.

If, as Sarup implies, the video recorder has offered the spectator control of how a film is viewed, that control has been wrested back from them by the filmmaker. Filmmakers such as David Lynch, Quentin Tarantino, David Fincher and Christopher Nolan are willing to repeat scenes, insert subliminal images and invert narrative expectations and they have actually resurrected the notion of the director as auteur, a notion which,

according to Sarup, has receded since it is supposedly the reader of the text who is in control of the way in which it is read. What Sarup has overlooked is that the same technology is also available to filmmakers and that these filmmakers have taken the way in which a film is read, subverted that strategy for their own purposes and reasserted their authorial rights. This return of the auteur is supported by the increasing use of the name of the director as a marketing tool where the name of the director is a point of access into the film for any potential spectator. The successful contemporary director has thus been imbued with a star persona just as great as or greater than the star personae of the actors he directs.

These filmmakers' use of the fractured narrative is an extension of the fractured way in which we receive information in a multimedia world and build up patterns and links to create stories. Nolan himself has suggested that non-classical approach to narrative better reflects our reception of information:

> My most useful definition of narrative is that it's a controlled release of information. You don't feel any obligation to release that information on a chronological basis. What's interesting about doing this is trying to expand the story in all directions. To me, that's the way we receive stories in everyday life. A newspaper gives you a headline, and the process of reading the article is a process of expanding the story. The follow up story next day would then increase your understanding further, and I wanted to take that approach to the structure of the film.
>
> (Nolan, 98)

This form of noir storytelling, where action is repeated, shown from different perspectives and chronologically inverted, is one of the characteristics of contemporary noir and is the 21st century's counterpart to the voiceover and flashback from the 1st cycle of film noir. This has been enabled by technological development, where the filmmaker can expand the home viewer's experience of the film through video or DVD.

However, there are filmmakers who are using technology to create film noir that harks back to the 1st cycle of film noir. A key example of this would be the Coen Brothers' *The Man Who Wasn't There* (2002). While it is now more expensive to shoot in black and white, partly due to cost of film stock and partly due to a lack of investment in the development of black and white filming, the Coen Brothers set out in this film to recreate the world of the mid 1940s and by implication the conditions of the 1st cycle of

film noir. That the film ends up as a pastiche of film noir, with all the tropes of the 1st cycle in place, suggests that they have not learnt from the mistakes of the filmmakers of noir of the early seventies, whose attempts at noir came across as recreations rather than creations of noir. As Erickson has noted:

> A film could be shot today with black-and-white film stock in the Academy aperture and it could be designed to look like the urban milieu of the forties; the buildings, the automobiles, the clothing etc.; yet, you could not recreate the awareness and sensitivity to that era's popular culture that a filmmaker living and experiencing life in that era did.
>
> (Erickson, 322)

The Coen brothers' *The Man Who Wasn't There* can thus be read as an exercise in technique and a celebration of style over content, but never a 1940s film noir, which is what it desperately wants to be. It can be seen to have more in common with Gus Van Sant's remake of *Psycho* (1998) than films such as *Lost Highway* (1996) or *Fight Club*, which use film noir conventions, such as the flashback in the case of *Lost Highway* to reappraise narrative forms, and the film as flashback as well as male paranoia in the case of *Fight Club*, to examine the position of the male in late 20th century society. To follow on from this, the contemporary noir filmmaker is not someone who is interested in recreating the look and feel of the past but is instead a director who is aware of that context yet seeks to question notions of narrative and spectatorial experience while creating analogies and exploring the way in which information is transmitted and received in the modern world and its filmic versions. That these perceptions are predominantly from the perspective of the male is something that will be discussed later in this chapter.

Furthermore, the contemporary noir director will also be exploring how these fractured narratives mirror the incomplete way in which the modern world is interpreted: precisely because there is so much information to be received and in so many different ways, it is impossible to get the whole picture. The noir director is suggesting that this has created a new psychological state beyond the relatively familiar Kafkaesque notion of the outsider struggling against bureaucracy. Just as forties and seventies noir was an expression of a particular set of sociological conditions in America, so the key examples of noir being made in the nineties and early 21st century are expressions of

the paranoia facing the specifically male protagonist in the late capitalist, hyper-technological and post-feminist world we are faced with. This is something taken up further in the chapter on *Following*.

Indeed Nolan's three feature films all involve protagonists who are either figures returning to more primitive lifestyles or are in locations significantly bereft of technology. The Young Man in *Following*, with his old-fashioned attraction to antiquated modes of writing, clearly wishes to return to a simpler age with his typewriter, which can be read as a rejection of modern methods of communication, while Leonard in *Memento* eschews all forms of technology, apart from his Polaroid camera, which might help him in his search for the killer. The very setting of *Insomnia* in the wilderness of Alaska in a land that never sleeps is clearly a location embedded in the pre-technological, with its limited resources and barren landscapes.

The 3rd cycle of noir is, just as the 1st cycle of noir was, a marriage of technological developments and an artistic expression of changing social conditions. Traditionally, noir has always been about the psychology of the individual and how that individual reacts, because of his/her psychology, within a given set of circumstances. The psychological portrait is normally paranoid or verging on the paranoid. What has changed is that the paranoia being addressed is not, as it was in the 1st cycle of noir, the changing relationships between men and women, but the changing relationships between man, technology and the media and the way in which information is received and processed. It is ironic that to express this paranoia of technology and the media, filmmakers have to use the most advanced forms of the very technology they are criticising.

## Narrative Voice in Noir and Nolan

When applied to 1st cycle film noir, the first-person narrative as a strategy has a number of filmic implications. The first of these is that the film will normally be guided in voiceover, since the voiceover clearly gives the spectator access to the confidential and confessional narrative and forces the spectatorial "I" to identify with the narratorial "I." The voiceover hence becomes the spectator's guide through the film's diegesis. This

voiceover can be one of two types: a present tense narration offering commentary to events as the narrator encounters them, an example of this being Humphrey Bogart's voiceover in the first third of *Dark Passage* (1947), where the audience identifies with the disembodied voiceover of an unseen protagonist depicted through point of view shots purely because the spectator knows that the voice is Humphrey Bogart's. Another example of this, but used to different effect, is that of the voiceover of *Stranger on the Third Floor* (1940). Here the voiceover is a commentary on the action and a present tense depiction of the conscience of the protagonist as he interacts with his environments and hypothesises about the sights and sounds he experiences. He thus guides the spectator to specific conclusions as to character types as well as encourages the spectator to establish empathy with the crisis of conscience the protagonist is suffering.

However, this present tense voiceover is far less frequent than the voiceover that introduces a flashback. Here the voiceover has a different effect. The spectator can **see** the present condition of the narrator: blindfolded and therefore relying on the memory of flashback in *Murder My Sweet*, dying in *Double Indemnity* and, most perversely, dead in *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) and naturally expects the voiceover-introduced flashback[13] to reveal how the present state is informed by the past filmic events. Claire Johnston supports this notion:

[13] The term "flashback" is something of a misnomer, since the length of the flashback can be anything from a few seconds to the length of the entire film as is the case with the three examples given. Indeed Nolan's use of the flashback is far more complex. He uses what can traditionally be called a flashback, with voiceover cues in, for example, Leonard's telling of the Sammy Jankis story in *Memento*, the Blonde's description of the murder in her house in *Following* and Dormer's eventual narration of manipulating evidence in *Insomnia*. Nolan also uses subliminal flashes, with an example being the insert shot of Leonard in a lunatic asylum. Finally he uses flashes. These can be of two kinds. A present tense flash would be where Dormer and, by implication the audience, imagines he sees his dead partner. The shot duration is of little more than a second. The second type of flash is one that is introduced with no cues and consists of a one or two second burst of imagery. These, images are, however, built up during the film and serve the dramatic purpose of clarifying the protagonist's present tense condition. Examples of this are the flashes of the attack on Leonard's wife in *Memento* and the blood seeping through the cloth that eventually reveals Dormer's manipulation of evidence in *Insomnia*. These flashes are becoming a recognised part of film grammar and their acceptance as part of filmic grammar is a reflection of the ways in which films are watched in the home environment.

> Director Billy Wilder and Raymond Chandler, the scriptwriter, used the narrative device, extremely rare in classic Hollywood cinema in the 40s, of having Neff recite the past events into a Dictaphone, so that the plot resolution is known from the outset, the film taking the form of a memory.
>
> (Johnston, 89)

What is of interest here is that Johnston is aware that film noir is more interested in "why" something happened rather than "what" happened, since the outcome is known from the outset. The classic Hollywood model of cause and effect narrative leading to a strong sense of closure while using invisible editing and restrained use of montage and point of view shots, allowed the spectator to be caught up in the narrative thread of "what" event leads onto another event within the logic of a film.[14]

This reversal of normal filmic temporality paradoxically gives the film a more realistic psychological profile, following the logic that a psychoanalyst treats a patient through the patient recounting events from their own life as a voiced-over commentary from the couch. This allows filmmakers to explore the traditional noir relationship of the solitary single male and the *femme fatale* and explore the psychology of the relationship far more effectively. Furthermore, this reversal suggests that the protagonist is more interested in the past rather than the present, as if the retelling of events will prolong their life, as they await their death (cf. *Double Indemnity*, and the 1946 version of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*). Classic cause and effect Hollywood narrative always has a future: the end of the film. The noir protagonist rarely has a future, but, more importantly, does not want one; he is content to relive his past glories in voiceover and flashback, normally involving the duplicitous female, as if these were the times when he felt most alive.

Nolan has used the voiceover and flashbacks in all three of his feature films to date. Indeed he recognises it as being an integral part of the film noir genre:

> Renfreu Neff: What about the non-linear structure? Do you feel that better suited for noir and thriller genre than others?

[14] However, it will be stated later in this chapter that Nolan himself claims not to be interested in the "why" but the "how". His own perception of his work suggests that Nolan focuses on formalist rather than humanist interests.

> Nolan: It's funny; that's another reason I've worked in this genre. Certainly the thriller is the genre in which the audience is most accepting of non-linear devices such as the flashback, such as the character sitting down to tell a story and flashing back within that. It's familiar in that genre and works very well there, so the audience is accepting of it, whereas it's probably harder for an audience to accept it in, say, a love story or a drama just centring around a person's love life.
>
> (*Creative Screenwriting*, Mar/Apr 2001 p.49)

In *Following*, the past tense voiceover introduces flashback and is of a confessional nature explaining how the Young Man has reached his present predicament. *Memento*'s use of voiceover is both present tense and past tense and is therefore a more complex application than the other examples previously mentioned. The film starts in present tense voiceover, partly to illustrate Leonard's mental state but also to help orientate the spectator within the narrative. The voiceover then switches to a past tense to give the expositional information required of the Sammy Jankis story as well as reveal discrepancies in Leonard's narrative, where the flashback image builds up a layer of filmic truth that is at odds with Leonard's version of events.

This aspect of Nolan's treatment of flashback and voiceover in *Memento* is significant and at odds with 1st cycle film noir flashbacks. Both the built up flashback of the attack on his wife and the transference of Leonard's story onto the Sammy Jankis myth are subjective, adulterated versions of the "truth." The traditional voiceover and flashback is normally male and reliable, where one is a synonym for the other. The critic Susan Hayward states:

> For an interesting play on female/male subjectivities see *Mildred Pierce*, Michael Curtiz, 1945. Of the three flashbacks, the first two are hers, the last and "truthful" one is that of the male and representative of the law, the police detective.
>
> (Hayward, 132)

While Leonard's unreliability is unusual, it is not setting a precedent. From the Classic period of film noir an example of such unreliability would be Waldo Lydecker's (if ever a name signified a character) voiceover and flashback in *Laura*. That the film starts with his voiceover and flashback explaining his unconsummated relationship with Laura and that he is later revealed to be the murderer might be at odds with male

veracity put forward by Hayward, but in no way at odds with his implied homosexuality and its unacceptability in forties mainstream Hollywood.

A further example of this unreliability, this time from the 3rd cycle of film noir is Kevin Spacey's Roger "Verbal" Kint in *The Usual Suspects.* He fabricates a whole film of flashbacks based on the notice board in front of him and his coffee cup as he is being interrogated, yet, in this case the audience is given possible cues as to his position both through his name and his positioning as a conman who is conning the police, his accomplices and the audience.

*Insomnia* uses the voiceover-introduced flashback, in the traditional sense of giving a filmic truth to Al Pacino's explanation of why he manipulated evidence. However, Nolan's use of flashback in *Insomnia* is a departure from traditional models and a continuation of his own use of flashback in *Memento*. His strategy of inserting seemingly unconnected images in bursts of increasing length arouses curiosity in the spectator as their significance, which is finally revealed in the aforementioned voiceover-introduced scene. He also uses quasi-subliminal flashes in both films as will be discussed in the relevant chapters. While David Fincher uses the same strategy in *Fight Club*, his purpose is somewhat different. Brad Pitt's Tyler Durden supposedly works as a projectionist who passes the time by inserting single images of erect penises into the films he is projecting. The very last shot of *Fight Club* is indeed of a single image of an erect penis, thus suggesting that the film we have watched has been tampered with. This is taking the narrative beyond the diegetic world of the film itself and suggests that the spectator is part of the same capitalist processes that I take the film to be criticising.

Nolan has also used another device that is a typical aspect of film noir narrative and camerawork and that is having the protagonist in every scene and having point of view shots from his perspective. This device goes back to the film generally accepted by critics as the first film noir of the 1st cycle: *The Maltese Falcon*.[15] All three of Nolan's

[15] There is only one scene in *The Maltese Falcon* that does not show Humphrey Bogart or that is shot from his perspective and that is the scene early on in the film where his partner, Archer, is shot. Ironically this is a point of view shot as well, since the spectator sees Archer walk towards the camera suggesting that the shot is filmed from the perspective of the killer. This could be a strategy on the part of the director, John Huston, to suggest to the spectator that Sam Spade shot his partner.

films rely on this with *Memento* using Leonard in every shot while *Following* and *Insomnia* only use cut away shots once each. In *Following* the cut away occurs during its denouement, where Cobb and the Blonde reveal the twist in the tale of the Young Man's predicament and in the case of *Insomnia* it is when Dormer tries to pre-empt the police search of Randy Stetz's apartment. His search of the apartment is intercut with parallel shots of the issue of the search warrant and the arrival of the police at Stetz's apartment. While the purpose of the cutaway in *Following* is to conclude narrative information, in *Insomnia*, the purpose is obviously to create tension in the spectator.

The voiceover and flashback in Nolan's three features may offer a version of subjective truth but Nolan's strategy of ensuring that the protagonists are in almost every shot ensure that the audience will eventually try to distance themselves from the claustrophobia that this strategy creates so as not to become encumbered in the character's unravelling paranoia. Indeed this strategy of playing off the flashback against the continued presence of the protagonist on screen works to make the spectator question the protagonist's motives just at the same time as the protagonist is beginning to question them himself. This is clear in *Memento*, and the ambivalence we feel towards the Pacino character in *Insomnia* grows at the same time as he becomes more and more unsure whether he shot his partner accidentally or not.

## Transforming The *Femme Fatale* in 3rd Cycle Noir

Nolan's three feature films all have identifiable noir tropes. The first to be considered is the *femme fatale*. Two of the films have figures that can be interpreted as *femmes fatales* while the third *Insomnia* has, in Tanya Francke, a character who attempts to use sex as a way of achieving goals but whose character is secondary to the main events of the film and whose sexual advances Dormer rejects. As a teenager she might also be considered as morally inappropriate to be a *femme fatale* in Hollywood[16]. More interestingly perhaps is the character whose advances Dormer does not reject. In Finch, we have a character that could be described as an *homme fatal*. It is his criminal

While ultimately disproved by the film's narrative outcome this notion is alluded to in the film by the attitude of the police towards Spade.

[16] This should be compared with Francke's counterpart in the Norwegian original. While supposedly the same age, she is both used and willing to be used by men.

ambition that tempts Dormer into the duplicitous relationship that is at the heart of the conventional *femme fatale*/protagonist relationship. Hayward describes the relationship between the male protagonist and the *femme fatale* as follows:

> He has allowed her to be on top because of his own insecurities about who he is.
>
> (Hayward, 130)

While Dormer in his normal milieu could not be described as insecure, his relocation to the nightless Alaska and his sleep deprivation have led to insecurities about his own actions, a situation which Finch believes, just like the *femme fatale*, he is perfectly capable of taking advantage of. That the denouement has both characters shoot each other simultaneously and apparently die within minutes of each other allows the film to achieve closure of what Hayward calls "the ideological contradictions"[17] between himself and Finch or the protagonist and the surrogate *femme fatale*, with this closure naturally favouring the side of legal representatives.

Another contemporary example of the *homme fatal* can be seen in David Fincher's *Fight Club*. The relationship between Brad Pitt's Tyler Durden and Ed Norton's unnamed narrator is one which clearly fits the pattern described above, with the Durden character ironically tempting the Narrator with a philosophy which is the antithesis of criminal capitalist ambition, as would be expected in traditional film noir. However, the relationship between *femme/homme fatal(e)* and protagonist is more complicated, since Norton can be said to represent passivity, and therefore a traditionally female characteristic in filmic terms, to Durden's aggressive masculinity. That the denouement reveals that both characters are one in the same, suggests the male and female characteristics in all of us, while the death of the protagonist(s) once again allows closure of the "ideological contradictions."

However, I would argue that Nolan has managed to create in the character of Natalie, a *femme fatale* in reverse. The standard pattern of the treachery of the *femme fatale* figure only being revealed after she has snared the protagonist is reversed in *Memento*, with Natalie seemingly sympathetic when we first see her in the film and only later revealing her *fatale* tendencies. *Memento* has neatly inverted and as a result subverted this

[17] *Cinema Studies The Key Concepts* p. 132.

traditional model, if the spectator unravels the events of the film and puts them in their proper chronological order. If this is done then Natalie is revealed as a character who starts off her chain of filmic events with reasons for her treacherous attitude towards Leonard (he has killed her boyfriend) and later learns to care for him, with her last line to Leonard, "We are both survivors," suggesting a degree of empathy with the protagonist that would not be possible for the true *femme fatale*.

The one thing that temporarily unites the male protagonist and the *femme fatale* in the forties and fifties film noir is criminal ambition. Examples as diverse as the eponymous Maltese Falcon, the double indemnity clause, the 40,000 dollars that brings Robert Mitchum and Jane Greer together in *Out of the Past* (1947) support this. Yet this criminal ambition is partly a pretext for an exploration of their relationship. Criminal activity, in actual fact, is not central to Nolan's depiction of the relationships between the protagonist and the *femme fatale* figure. While *Following* imitates the type of *femme fatale* and *Memento* has the apparently duplicitous Natalie, it is the criminal relationship between the featured males that is central to both films. This trend is also continued in *Insomnia* where the relationship between Dormer and Finch is far more interesting than the relationship between Dormer and Burr.

This is something that Nolan has in common with other noir makers of the nineties. *The Game* (1997) and *Fight Club* are more interested in depictions of the male and male relationships in crisis, while *Pulp Fiction* is more interested in citing films than citing types in films. *The Man Who Wasn't There* tells the story from the perspective of the husband of the *femme fatale*, which has the effect of relegating her to a role of secondary importance. Certainly films like *Basic Instinct* and *Disclosure* (1994) involve figures who could be described as *femmes fatales* in Sharon Stone and Demi Moore respectively, but these characters seem to be larger-than-life versions of what the *femme fatale* should be: overtly promiscuous, overtly sexually aggressive and obviously malevolent. Furthermore, the presence of Michael Douglas and his star persona in both films predicts a positive outcome, regardless of the teasing last image of *Basic Instinct*.

It could be suggested that modern male filmmakers' nervousness about taking on the *femme fatale* spring from a paranoia that according to Amelia Jones, quoted in Stables' previously referred to essay, is defined as follows:

> Male paranoia is a defence aimed at rebuilding the subject-object dichotomy that threatens to dissolve as more and more women … take on both masculine and feminine roles.
>
> (Jones, quoted in Stables, 167)

While contentious, it does seem that the modern filmmaker, whether for reasons of political correctness, paranoia or audience demography is unwilling to (re)address, except in the cartoonish terms of *Basic Instinct* and *Disclosure,* the *femme fatale* for the 21st century. This could also be the reason why the notion of the *homme fatal* is coming to the fore, with Teddy's manipulation of Leonard in *Memento*, (see page 91), and Cobb's manipulation of the Young Man in *Following*, (see page 69) as further examples of the trend.

## Crime and Detection in Nolan's Noir

Criminal activity in Nolan's films is possible at any time of day, rather than confined to the cover of the night as in the forties noir world. Cobb and the Young Man rob by daylight, Leonard meets his victims at the warehouse in broad daylight and naturally Dormer's shooting of Eckhart has to occur in the constant daylight of an Alaskan summer, even if it is a killing that is conveniently shrouded in a literal and metaphorical fog. Nolan uses the glare of daylight to reveal the isolation of the protagonist rather than to occlude him in night-time of shadows. Consider the scene in *Insomnia* where Dormer is in the teenaged suspect's flat looking for the gun. He moves, in the never-ending daylight from a place of shadow into daylight and his confused state is apparent. This should be contrasted with a classic example of exposure through light in *The Third Man* (1949), when Harry Lime is first shown as he steps out of the shadows into the light to glance side ways into the camera. The scene reveals not just the character for the first time in the film but also his criminal nature as suggested by his sideways cocky look. The noir world of the forties seeks to hide guilt in the shadows; the noir world of Nolan seeks to bring it into the glare of a Los Angeles or Alaskan sunlight. In both

cases it is a luminosity that dazzles and dazes rather than illuminates. It is a reversed noir, a noir blanc, where extreme light has taken the place of extreme shadow.

Two of Nolan's three protagonists, Leonard and Dormer are or have been representatives of legal forces and both share a somewhat ambiguous relationship with the police: Leonard is being manipulated by Teddy and Dormer is being investigated about his detective practices. This links them quite clearly with the male noir protagonist of the forties. This is something the French critic Nino Frank noted in his 1946 essay:

> The detective is not a mechanism but a protagonist, that is the character most important to us: accordingly the heroes of *Maltese Falcon* (sic.) and *Murder, My Sweet* practice this strange profession of private detective, which (in the U.S.) has nothing to do with bureaucratic function but, by definition, puts them on the fringe of the law – the law as represented by the police and the codes of gangsters as well.
>
> (Frank, 16)

While Dormer may be a police officer, his transgressions have led him to being "on the fringe of the law." This positioning on the fringe inevitably suggests that he, Leonard and the Young Man are outsiders, in the existentialist sense, with the existentialists taking the protagonist's isolation even further as Shrader noted:

> The hard-boiled hero was, in reality, a soft egg compared to his existentialist counterpart (Camus is said to have based *The Stranger* on McCoy[18]), but he was a good deal tougher than anything American fiction had seen.
>
> (Shrader, 56)

If the protagonist is a private detective, they normally operate on the margins of the law but are capable of straying on either side when necessary to forward their investigation. The denouement will normally reveal that the detective has the interests of the law at heart, even if his relationship with legal forces is strained (cf. *The Maltese Falcon, The Big Sleep* (1946)). As outsiders these figures belong to neither a legal nor illegal social

[18] Horace McCoy, author of *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* However, it seems more likely that Camus based Mersault on the Frank Chambers character in James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, a book Camus almost certainly read, as opposed to Horace McCoy, a man Camus never met. Source: www.crimeculture.com/contents/hard-boiled.html.

group, yet know the *mores* of both. They are invariably unmarried[19], thus increasing their isolation and availability to the *femme fatale* figure and invariably drawn into relationships with the *femme fatale* that they believe they are in control of. It should be noted that while much of *Memento*'s diegetic world is dependent on Leonard having once been apparently happily married but now widowed and alone, no mention is made in *Insomnia* as to Dormer's marital status, suggesting that he is unattached.

The protagonist's position as an outsider in film noir can also be read as a metaphor for the way in which modern living reduces the individual to the anonymous. The city is a backdrop for this anonymity. By setting film noir in the city and filming action at night, location lacks specificity. The isolation is implicit in the way protagonists are filmed: moving in and out of shadows or, metaphorically, moving in and out of being. The apartments of the male protagonist are normally sparse and lacking the decorative elements normally associated with the home, as if they are temporary bases from which the protagonist can set out from into his natural environment: the streets, bars and clubs of the night.

Nolan, however, hardly even gives his protagonists apartments. Admittedly the Young Man in *Following* has his flat, but he spends more time in the streets following people than at home writing. Leonard and Dormer, on the other hand, are housed in the permanent temporariness of the motel; a place which Marc Augé, paraphrased in Peter Wollen's *Paris Hollywood: Writings on Films,* believes is in actual fact a non-place. Wollen goes on to write:

> Non-places, Augé comments, tend to be saturated with signage and texts (instructions, information, etc.)
>
> (Wollen, 200)

It is inevitable that Leonard should end up in such a non-place given his need for facts; such a non-place mirrors perfectly his condition, while the information supplied in signs around the hotel allow him to create another level of structure in his life. Dormer, on the other hand, moves between the non-place of the hotel and the bright space of the

[19] An exception to this would be Glenn Ford's character in *The Big Heat*, but since his wife is blown up early on in the film he too becomes a representative of the outsider.

Alaskan landscape, where each becomes a metaphor for the moral dilemma he finds himself in.

All three of Nolan's protagonists comply with the condition of having an ambiguous relationship with legal forces stated above. In *Following*, The Young Man's relationship is clearly the most straightforward of the three protagonists, since he finds himself at the end of the film being investigated for murder. However, Leonard's and Dormer's relationships with legal forces are far more complex. By giving Leonard the investigative duties and skills inherent in his background of being an insurance investigator, Nolan is legitimising his apparent ability to investigate his wife's murder and ensuring that the spectator has a surrogate detective figure in the film to attempt to unravel the clues. Whereas Dormer, as a successful detective, is familiar with the working practices of both the police and the criminal, while his relationship with the police force is strained due to his supposedly immoral working practices, which are under investigation. Yet, as with all noir, what is really being investigated is the moral character of the protagonist under pressure.

## Location and Setting in Nolan's Noir

Alain Silver has described the landscape in films in his essay "Fragments of the Mirror: Hitchcock's Noir Landscape," as follows:

> The film landscape is posed as a synthesis of the immediate, particularised, and textural reality seen on the screen and a potential, generalised, structural reality which may be extrapolated from it.
>
> (Silver, 107)

Location in noir is culturally specific and easily identifiable to contemporary American audiences: whether it is the iconic city of Los Angeles of *Double Indemnity* and *Sunset Boulevard*[20], the depression America roadside diner of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* or the rundown motel in *Psycho* (1960). Each serves the purpose of placing the protagonist in an environment of strangeness, by taking them out of an environment they are familiar with and transporting them to one they are not familiar with. The

[20] It is an accident of nature that Los Angeles has come to represent the corruption of the big city and by implication Hollywood itself: if establishing shots were needed where better to do them than in the very city the film is being shot in. It wasn't until *The Naked City* (1948) that the city as construct was shot on location in, in this case, New York.

audience extrapolates generalised truths from location about character and the type of film being watched, just as much as they do from watching a specific star within any given film.

While each of Nolan's three films has a geographically and therefore culturally specific location, his use of them is somewhat at odds with the concept of the city as a character, as suggested by location in certain Classic noir. Silver suggests that:

> In a kind of visual synecdoche, well-known edifices such as the Eiffel Tower, Big Ben, or the Empire State Building identify not only themselves but also act as a convenient shorthand for the entire cities which encompass them.
>
> (Silver, 108)

This can go further, the establishing shot of a city not only fixes the spectator in terms of location but also indicates the type of drama that will unfold there: each city becomes a stereotypical representation of the type of characters to be found there and the type of drama to unfold there. In this way a Hollywood shot of the Eiffel Tower accompanied by accordion music might indicate an approaching love story. This is something that Nolan is apparently not interested in. James Theobald, who plays the Young Man in *Following*, draws attention to this:

> An awful lot of films shot in London go down the unfortunate road of making sure they can sell in the US, doing picture-postcard shots of driving past Tower Bridge or going around Trafalgar square.
>
> (Nolan, 97)

While *Following* is culturally specific since the characters clearly have English accents, the lack of specificity in terms of location is supposed to mean that the spectator focuses more on the characters and their interaction rather than where they do it. Nolan himself attests to this in his interview with Stephen Garrett:

> My concept was to write a thriller that has absolutely no padding whatsoever, and no gratuitous characterisation. To me it's the classic film noir model: you define the characters by what they do to each other – by their actions, not their psychology.
>
> (*Filmmaker*, p 62)

However Nolan's belief in a lack of gratuitous characterisation, which by implication can also be extended to location, is at odds with what we see in the film. Pete Wollen states that:

> Essentially, film architecture has been designed primarily to reflect the activities and attitudes of its users – the dramatic characters whose lives are depicted in the film. It is narrativized and dramatized architecture.
>
> (Wollen, 207)

What is true of architecture is also true of location. In this way the anonymous locations in *Following* actually serve to delineate the character of the Young Man and his activities; he can follow people precisely because he is an anonymous individual, walking in anonymous streets, following anonymous individuals. What is interesting in Nolan is that there clearly are specific locations in all three films from the roof tops of London in *Following*, through the outskirts of Los Angeles in *Memento* and the Alaskan wilderness in *Insomnia*, which are used, whether knowingly or not, to delineate character.

This notion can also be seen in *Memento*. Much of the film eschews establishing shots, preferring to enter a scene directly from Leonard's perspective. This means that the spectator is effectively blinkered as to where, in a broader context, events are taking place. We eventually learn through insert shots of, for example, Teddy's Los Angeles driving licence where these events may be taking place, but the focus is clearly on Leonard and his systems. It is the location's very anonymity that further forces the spectator to focus on Leonard's actions. Patti Podesta, who worked as production designer on *Memento*, attests to this:

> We wanted something anonymous. We were looking for locations that were exchangeable with each other, which was not that easy. Chris specifically didn't want it to look like Southern California… We were looking for a place you could not place. A no-place. A place that is pervasive, everywhere, but you never look at it, for the most part.
>
> (Mottram, 154)

If Nolan sought such anonymity for his locations in *Memento*, *Insomnia* is paradoxically set in a location that is highly specific, cinematographically novel and

charged with dramatic potential. Amy Taubin is aware of this in her article, "Under the Midnight Sun":

> There are two stars in Christopher Nolan's new thriller *Insomnia*: Al Pacino and the Alaskan landscape. Pacino looks like shit; Alaska doesn't have a bad angle. Something in Nolan's montage – at the opening he cuts from a small plane skimming across snow-dappled wilderness and choppy gray-blue water to Pacino slumped and bleary-eyed inside the plane – suggests that he knows the crux of the movie is in the difference.
>
> (*Film Comment*, 26)

The Alaskan landscape takes on a primeval appearance and such a blank landscape Nolan would probably argue allows him to focus on character, character interaction and motivation. Yet, as has already been suggested, it is this very barrenness that acts as a metaphor for the clouded moral dilemma Dormer finds himself in. His struggle is, therefore, as much with the Alaskan landscape as it is with Finch. *Insomnia* is, within its world of never-ending daylight, a filmic negative of a film noir, where all colours are reversed and the blacks become whites and the whites become blacks. In this way the Alaskan daylight becomes as dark as the Los Angeles noir night.

## Contradictions in 3rd Cycle Noir and Noir's Future

Recent years have shown a renewed interest in complex film storytelling even if the classical model of invisible 3rd person narrative still predominates in Hollywood. As David Lynch has simply put it:

> In Hollywood, more often than not, they're making more kind of traditional films, stories that are understood by people. And the entire story is understood.
>
> (http://us.imdb.com.name/nm0000186/bio)

However, certain filmmakers (Cf. Lynch, Fincher, Soderbergh, Tarantino and Nolan) are more interested not in what stories are told but how stories are told. They are more interested in the structure and form of narrative than the end of narrative. They are still telling stories, but do so in a way that reflects the fractured way in which we receive information in a world that is media-driven. They have realised that fracturing narrative

through flashbacks, subliminal imagery and reordering events is a reflection of how the world is perceived in a world that the media has saturated with text and images.

Their concern is apparently not with psychology of the character, but with the process of disclosure through action itself[21]. Nolan himself attests to this in his interview with Renfreu Neff:

> For me there is a very strong form of characterisation in the noir/thriller genre. It relates back to the historical model of character always being defined through action. In all other genres of cinema it sort of comes down to people expecting characterization to come through dialogue, or, you know, characters talking about who they were ten years before, or what's happened in their lives.
>
> (*Creative Screenwriting*, 49)

While Nolan is being overly simplistic in his consideration of how character is defined in other genres[22], his comments suggest that the modern noir filmmaker, and Nolan in particular, is less interested in the psychology of the character i.e.: why he does something and more interested in what the character does. This shift in emphasis further indicates Nolan's formalist concerns.

This is at odds with what was proposed earlier, that noir is always about psychology. Yet this may have more to do with filmmakers not necessarily being aware of the full implications of their work. Indeed, the psychological motivation of Jeffrey and Frank Booth in *Blue Velvet*, Detective David Mills in *Se7en* (1995) and even Leonard in *Memento* is an integral part of plot resolution. Ironically, the director whose work is most open to psychological interpretation, David Lynch; supports this notion of a decline in interest in psychology:

> It's better not to know so much about what things mean or how they might be interpreted or you'll be too afraid to let things keep happening. Psychology destroys the mystery, this kind of magic quality.
>
> (http://us.imdb.com.name/nm0000186/bio)

[21] See Nolan's quote on page 33/34.
[22] One should bear in mind the position of John Wayne and Clint Eastwood as characters defined through actions rather than dialogue in the Western and even how dance defines the character of Fred Astaire or Gene Kelly in musicals.

This stated lack of interest in why characters do things in 3rd cycle noir is ironic considering that one of the accepted influence on the 1st cycle of film noir was psychology and psychoanalysis. Phil Hardy has described this influence as follows:

> Increasingly what came to be at issue and under examination was not the group or society but the individual and divided self… As psychology and psychoanalysis found their way to Hollywood in the late 1940s they provided writers and directors with the image of an over- and underworld within a single person (consciousness and the unconscious).
>
> (Hardy, 308)

This notion of the over- and underworld being contained within the one individual is probably most sharply drawn in the single character of the Narrator/Tyler Durden in *Fight Club*. However, this move away from interest in psychology is perhaps not so surprising when one considers, as has been suggested earlier, that the themes of the three cycles of film noir are clearly different, with film noir being the most appropriate genre to address a specific set of social conditions. In this way, 3rd cycle noir and, indeed, Nolan's noir is a formalistic device that, of all the mainstream genres, is the most suitable to examine how information is transmitted and received, how the storytelling process has evolved and, most importantly, is the genre least likely to be constrained by definition and thus is most open to the filmmaker's interpretation of late 20th century/early 21st century society.

That filmmakers are keen to play down the importance of the psychological motivation is perhaps a reflection of the pluralism of philosophies present in modern living. It is certainly true that the status of psychology and psychoanalysis as a system of understanding human beings and their interactions has been downgraded from its fashionability in the forties as *the* system through which human behaviour could be understood. Film noir is a genre that, in its present reincarnation, is superficially more interested in how the game of life is played and not why it is played. While this might be said to encourage an increasing superficiality in modern living, one which Fredric Jameson has described as a "postmodern loss of historical depth",[23] I would argue that this is merely the reflection of the society within which the films are being made and

[23] As quoted in John Hill "Film and Postmodernism" p 101.

not a philosophical argument as such. The very plurality of interpretations the 3rd cycle noir is open to is one that is encouraged in the plurality of modern living.

Furthermore, modern noir filmmakers are interested in playing with the conventions of the genre and game playing itself. This is something that Sean Lindsay has referred to in his essay published online concerning David Fincher's *The Game*:

> Fincher exploits the game that is inherent in the noir mystery as we try to figure out the twist, the trick ending.
>
> (www.senseofcinema.com)

Nolan is very much a part of this movement. His films play with audience expectation and subvert the rules of noir narrative, allowing the audience to believe one thing and then snatching it away from them. In other words, to paraphrase Cobb in *Following*, you show the audience what they had and then you take it away from them.

Foster Hirsch has argued that, in his discussion of *The Game* in *Detours and Lost Highways: A map of Neo-Noir*, this game playing can be for very high stakes:

> It is, however, a perilous model that if pursued could lead to the death of noir. Treating the form as only a game, as canivalesque theatre of the absurd, a sequence of what in retrospect are vaudevillian turns, the film contains the seeds of the genre's destruction.
>
> (Hirsch, 229)

I find this unlikely. Noir has always been difficult to define, precisely because it hides in its own shadows. This means that when the present cycle has run its course and its formalist concerns have become a hollow depiction of contemporary living, the genre will return to the shadows from whence it came to resurface in another fifteen or twenty years as the most appropriate genre to deal with the psychological uncertainties and anxieties of the time.

## CHAPTER TWO – NOLAN'S BRITISH INDEPENDENT FILMS

## ***DOODLEBUG*- AN EXERCISE IN TECHNIQUE**

**Synopsis**

An unnamed character (James Theobald) is desperately chasing around a room as if trying to find a bug or a mouse. He eventually corners his prey and brings his foot down on his victim. The film cuts away to reveal a foot bearing down on a miniature version of the young man himself.

**Nolan's Discipline**

*Doodlebug* runs to only two minutes fifty-five seconds of screen time. Within this short period of screen time some of the narrative and formalistic issues that Nolan would address in his feature films are already apparent. Two minutes fifty-five seconds are enough to show Nolan's burgeoning interest in disturbing the spectator's narrative expectations through structural twists that lead the spectator to question the relationships between themselves and the protagonist(s). In addition it shows his taste for the twist in the tale, apparent in the denouement of *Following* and *Memento*, which were also both scripted by Nolan. The use of clear narrative patterns that undermine their own structural certainty is probably a reflection of Nolan's games play and means that the resulting film comes across as being self-consciously clever, delighting in its own artistic conceit.

Nolan's understanding of the formalistic elements of filmmaking already seem apparent in this early film. His understanding of the use of extreme close up and the point of view shot to achieve identification between the spectator and the protagonist are developed in all three of his feature films and indicate a director who is aware of how stories are told through film, yet not necessarily aware of how to allow the spectator to achieve emotional empathy with the protagonist, partly because the length of the film prevents this and partly because the subject matter of the film is of a surrealist nature. This notion of technical rather than emotional filmmaking applies to all of Nolan's feature films, possibly with the exception of *Insomnia*, which achieves a degree of empathy with the protagonist through its use of an identifiable star persona. The

reasons for this lack of interest in emotional empathy have already been addressed in the introduction.

He states in the director's commentary that accompanies the film that it is an exercise in the tracking shot and the use of blue screen special effects. That Nolan can have such technical ambitions with such a limited budget is revealed in the following quotation taken from Stephen Garrett's interview with him:

> Nolan's principal film education came at the University College London where he was a member of a film society. The group would raise funds by showing 35mm prints of second-run films, and then use the revenue to buy film stock and maintain the film equipment they all shared, including a Steenbeck, a Nagra, mics, lights and cameras, all in the basement of the theatre they managed. "It was a great place to experiment and to learn because there was no structure," Nolan remembers, pointing out that the group would give their members only ten minutes of film to make a three to four minute movie. "It was a very, very good exercise for focusing on exactly what you need. To have had the experience of limitations can be a useful skill."
>
> (*Filmmaker*, Spring 1999, p.63)

It should be noted at this stage that Nolan has had no formal training in filmmaking. His degree at the University College London was in English Literature, which reveals itself in how well the narrative in his feature films is structured.

This quote also reveals another tendency that Nolan has: to contradict himself to suit his own purposes. He can state that the film club had no structure and then immediately imply that the film they made were, in actual fact, structured by the limitations of only having a certain amount of film stock. Such limitations inevitably structure the working practices of a developing artist, whereby he has to use creatively the limited resources available. Nolan himself admits that being able to use limitation is a very useful skill. Whether he contradicts himself or not, what is revealing here is that Nolan, either through circumstance or personality, is a disciplined director. This observation is supported and developed in the next section of this chapter relating to his first feature film, *Following*.

Furthermore, Nolan's interest in the more technical aspects of filmmaking support the notion that he is an intellectual rather than emotional director, someone who is more

interested in the practicalities of filming a certain shot and its technical challenges instead of the emotional layers created by the interaction of the characters on screen. This is not to criticise him as a filmmaker, merely to state that he is one type of filmmaker, in the tradition of, say, Stanley Kubrick, rather than another, in the tradition of, say, Douglas Sirk.

**Theme and Narrative Strategy**

In terms of theme, *Doodlebug* is the precursor of Nolan's interest in the existential crisis of modern living of his later films since we can clearly see a protagonist displaying traits of paranoia and personality disintegration. The story is reminiscent of Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, where the protagonist is initially unaware of the changes in the way in which he perceives himself and the film is obviously referencing the existential angst of this literary work. The noir themes are also evident even if the final result, due to screen length, can only be considered a thumbnail sketch.

Within the screen time of *Doodlebug*, the story is told of a man chasing around a room apparently trying to exterminate an insect. This is the assumption that the spectator makes from the "bug" element of the title and the scurrying movements of the object that the man is chasing. That the insect he eventually captures and squashes is actually himself, can be read as a metaphor for how the conscious suppresses elements of its own personality through the subconscious. The protagonist is, in turn, squashed by a larger version of himself, suggesting a complex relation between the conscious and the subconscious and the protagonist's attempts to deny elements of his own personality[24].

In this way, the full "doodlebug" explosion of the title and its Second World War referent[25] is revealed, both to the protagonist, as he becomes the instrument of his own suppression and the spectator, as our expectations are exploded. The "doodle" element of the title perhaps suggests that this film is in fact a sketch for the films that Nolan

[24] It is interesting to note that the end image of *Doodlebug*, where the protagonist treads on a smaller version of himself and then is trodden on by a larger version of himself is mirrored in the later posters for *Memento*, in which Leonard and Natalie are superimposed upon each other in an infinite regression of Polaroids.

[25] The Doodlebug was the popular term given by the British to the unmanned V1 flying bombs used by the Germans to attack mainland Britain towards the end of the Second World War.

would later make. In fact this doodle element can in fact be considered as a cartoon, a burlesque both in terms of theme and performance. The film posits itself both through its denouement and its acting style as exaggerated, with James Theobald, either through a lack of acting skills or under direction, effectively hamming up his performance in the tradition of the melodramatic, moustache-twirling villain.

While *Doodlebug* may only be a very short film, it does offer a revealing glimpse of the early stages of Nolan's career and suggests that the thematic interests of his three features films are ones that have interested him for a long time. In terms of narrative twists, the elements that would later distinguish *Following* and *Memento* seem already to be in place. Nolan is aware of this in the accompanying director's commentary where he describes the film as "the same kind of thing that's appeared in my films since." It is no coincidence that we see in *Doodlebug* a solitary male in the throes of an existential crisis, a theme that is developed in all of Nolan's feature films to date. Furthermore, common symbols from Nolan's later films, such as clocks and telephones, are already present in *Doodlebug*, suggesting that Nolan is a director who is aware of the symbolic value of objects when placed in the filmic landscape.

**Nolan's Formalist Concerns**

As already stated, in formal terms, Nolan describes the film in the same director's commentary as an exercise in tracking shots, one which he goes on to say he feels actually spoils the overall feel of the film. The spectator barely has enough time to notice the formal considerations of an overuse of the tracking shot, which Nolan claims to be the case, before the film has finished. What is interesting in technical terms is that, even though the film is in black and white and therefore a precursor of both *Following* and *Memento*, in terms of final appearance, it was actually shot in 16 mm colour and then degraded to black and white. The reason it was shot in colour is for the relatively complex series of blue screen shots that reveal the twist in the tale of the man chasing himself and that were needed to allow Nolan to superimpose Jeremy Theobald's character on the screen at the end of the film.

The production values in the film are also worth commenting on, since, despite being a low budget film, Nolan has managed to successfully achieve the effect he wanted at the

end of the film when the Men tread upon themselves without breaking the screen illusion. However, the spectator is aware from the outset of the closing sequence that the effect has been achieved through special effects. This, while contrasting with the albeit cartoonish naturalism of the rest of the film, also allows the narrative logic of the ending to become apparent and remain intact. What is effective here is that while the spectator is aware that they are watching special effects, the ending of the film intellectually involves them. Thus the obvious failings, in technical terms on second viewing, of the blue screen shots are secondary to the neatness in the way in which the narrative is concluded.

## Nolan's Working Practices

Nolan's interest in overseeing all aspects of production can easily be confirmed by a look at the brief credits, where he is credited with writing, directing, shooting and editing the film as well as receiving a co-credit for production design with Alberto Matuissi. While this is almost certainly due to economic necessity, it does suggest that Nolan's subsequent interest in all aspects of production has a solid grounding in hands on experience. It also suggests, however, as I will show in later chapters, that Nolan is a person who likes to be in control of the production process but nonetheless a director who needs a key group of people around him.

Jeremy Theobald and Ivan Cornell, responsible for sound and lighting design on this film, would later work with Nolan on *Following*. Christopher Nolan's younger brother, Jonah is also credited in *Doodlebug* as being a grip. The influence of his brother Jonah in relation to *Memento* cannot be overstated, since it was Jonah who wrote the original short story that the film was based on[26], as well as developing the official website that adds other layers to the diegetic world of the film and which are not apparent unless the website is accessed. Aspects of this will be discussed in the chapter on *Memento*.

Furthermore, he has used the same production associate, Emma Thomas, his wife, as well as the same composer, David Julyan, on all three feature films. These two go back to his first film in London, but since his move to America he has used Wally Pfister as director of photography and Dody Dern as editor on both *Memento* and *Insomnia*.

[26] See footnote page 3.

Nolan obviously believes Pfister and Dern share a common understanding of how his films should be shot and edited. It should be noted that these partnerships are to be continued in *Batman: Intimidation*, where four familiar names will once more reappear: Emma Thomas, David Julyan, Dody Dern and Wally Pfister[27].

In tandem with this consistency of creative input is a consistency in Nolan's modus operandi in filming the three films. Possibly as a result of him being the cameraman on his first film, he is still keen to sit as close to the camera as possible, checking the camera movements and the actors' performances through video feedback as the film was being shot. Pfister in Mottram's *Making of Memento* supports this:

> Nolan himself would use the monitor as a "tool", as Pfister puts it. During the production, mounted on the camera was an on-board monitor, usually used to see if the picture was in focus. "Chris would glance back and forth between the small monitor and the actors. He spent a lot of time right next to the camera. Often, I would float with the camera, and I would do a documentary style, going off on my own to get the pieces I knew Chris wanted. But for performance, he would sit next to the camera and watch the actors.
>
> (Mottram, 124)

While it is common practice in modern filmmaking for the director to view the scenes being filmed through a monitor, the monitor is normally positioned away from the set, with the result that the director is physically removed from the actors they are directing.

This degree of Nolan's involvement with watching the performance of the actors on set is also attested to by Al Pacino in the DVD package for *Insomnia* where he states that Nolan adopts a practice which is unusual in modern filmmaking, of rehearsing the day before the scene to be shot the following day, while Nolan's degree of involvement and attention to detail extends to areas of filmmaking that are normally left to the second unit. All key actors in both *Memento* and *Insomnia* do their own inserts, which are filmed under Nolan's direction. This is apparently an unusual practice in Hollywood, where inserts are normally filmed by the second unit and do not involve the principal actors. Due to the severe financial restraint under which it was made, what was a practice of necessity in *Following* became a deliberate choice of style in *Memento* and

[27] Source: www.christophernolan.net.

*Insomnia*. The DVD package for the latter draws attention to the insert of Pacino pulling the torn photo of the dead girl's best friend from the dustbin and rubbing it against the half it was torn from, which Nolan describes as follows:

> I like to shoot inserts as I go and actually get the actor to do this… There's performance in that movement and it's great to actually get the actor to do this.
>
> (DVD *Insomnia*, director's commentary)

Wally Pfister further attests to the practice in Mottram's *Making of Memento*:

> During the shoot, the inserts were shot by the first-unit camera crew, a task Chris was insistent was left to them, and not the second or clean-up unit. "Quite often, the second-unit insert shots need to be re-shot, or there are continuity problems. It does make sense to have the first unit do them wherever possible," says Pfister. "Chris was adamant, and it took a bit of pushing against the first AD (Assistant Director) and the production manager."
>
> (Mottram, 120-1)

While his working practices may differ from those of his contemporaries, Nolan is inevitably losing a degree of authorial control over the course of the three films, due to his loss of independence and a need to bow to the pressures of the studio. Some of the footage in *Insomnia* was shot at Warner Bros.' insistence[28]. This pressure to include footage might extend even further as he takes on his first truly big budget film with *Batman: Intimidation*, where the studio, once again Warner Bros., will be more interested in protecting a franchise than the reputation of a director.

Nolan seems to want to establish a core group of creative influences around him who share his understanding of the world he wants to depict in his films. That it is his vision which is being transferred to the screen cannot be doubted, if one considers the thematic and narrative similarities in his feature films to date and how these themes are depicted on the screen.

[28] See Page 129.

## BUDGET, NOIR AND PARANOIA IN *FOLLOWING*

### Synopsis

An unnamed Young Man (James Theobald) with ambitions of being a writer, who is unemployed and unattached, takes to following strangers as part of his research for an unwritten book. He establishes rules for following people, which are soon broken when he starts following Cobb (Alex Haw), a well-dressed burglar who shows the Young Man the skills of his trade and the research necessary to burgle a house. The Young Man has also started following a young blonde woman (Lucy Russell) who coincidentally happens to be one of the targets for Cobb's burglaries. A relationship of sorts develops between the Young Man and the Blonde, who, unbeknownst to the Young Man, is also involved with Cobb as well as a shady gangland figure known as the Bald Guy (Dick Bradsell), who has some compromising photos of her and knows she has witnessed him commit murder. The Young Man is coerced by the Blonde into robbing the gangster's safe to retrieve the photos, but he also at the same time steals a lot of money and attacks a man with a hammer when he is caught in the act. He rushes to the Blonde's house, asking her to help him. She refuses and tells him that Cobb has set him up for a murder that had been committed the previous week. He then goes to the police to confess, (the police officer played by John Nolan[29]). In the meantime, the Blonde tells Cobb what had happened. Cobb, who is working for the Bald Guy, then murders her because of what she knows, using the same hammer the Young Man had used. He is therefore set up for the murder of the Blonde and Cobb promptly disappears into the London streets.

[29] Two members of Nolan's immediate family have worked with him on his films. Firstly there is John Nolan, who is his uncle and had reasonable success in the 70s starring in *Terror* (1979) as well as appearing in two other films and two TV series of the early seventies. His appearance in *Following* is his first credited screen work since 1979. Secondly, there is his younger brother Jonathan (Jonah) Nolan, who wrote the original short story for *Memento*, developed the website for the same and has worked with Nolan on a number of as yet unfilmed screenplays. One might also include his wife, Emma Thomas's involvement in all his films as, variously, producer, associate producer and co-producer.

## Background

Christopher Nolan's first feature film *Following* (1998) was self-financed with, according to the Internet Movie Database, a budget of USD 6,000. It was shot on 16mm black and white film stock at weekends, since all the principal actors and Nolan himself were working during the week. It was shot entirely on location in London using a handheld camera and natural light sources. Due to economic necessity all scenes were shot in one or two takes and, to help with the economics of the process, the actors had spent the six months prior to shooting rehearsing two evenings a week. The limited resources meant that filming took a year, with Nolan paying for the development of film stock shot the previous weekend out of his salary[30]. After the film was shown at the San Francisco Film Festival it was picked up by the New York company Next Wave Films, who re-recorded the soundtrack and blew the film up to 35mm. This led to a distribution deal with the American company Zeitgeist Films.

The largely trouble-free distribution history of *Following* is quite ironic, bearing in mind the later problems that Nolan would have in America in getting distribution of his next feature, *Memento.* The distribution of the two films is one of reverse expectations, (appropriate perhaps given their narrative structure): Nolan managed to get a distribution deal for *Following*, which was shot entirely in London, for America before he could get one for England. The situation with *Memento* is the opposite. As a result of the interest in *Following*, *Memento* was shot entirely in the heart of Hollywood but only got a distribution deal in America after the film had been successful in Europe. Nolan was certainly aware of the irony of this situation:

> But I certainly didn't get any scripts from English companies. I'm always asked, "Why are you working in America now? It's only very recently that I've had any interest from English companies. The release (of *Following*) was not great, but, to be honest, it's an on-going struggle that filmmakers have. There are very few happy independent filmmakers.
>
> (Nolan, 102)

[30] During the making of *Following* Nolan was involved with the camera and sound work on training videos. He is reticent about giving further details as to what these films are. Source: www.metro.co.uk/metro/interviews

As can be seen, Nolan at this stage of his career was keen to be associated with independent filmmaking. However, this notion of independence in the contemporary filmmaking world and to what extent Nolan is, or rather was, an independent filmmaker needs to be examined first.

## Independent films?

The term "Independent Film" is a loaded one. It seems to imply a certain un-Hollywood-like approach to filmmaking, with different production values, narratives and thematic content. The very word "independent" implies a freedom from the restraints of, or, literally, a lack of dependence on corporate business interests. This is not necessarily the case, since an independence from modern Hollywood for financing and distribution is not necessarily as evident as it appears, particularly in view of the product made under the term "independent."

The phrase "Independent Film" for the most part is itself a generic term, appealing to a certain type of art-house audience, who are less interested in the commercial fare offered by mainstream Hollywood. As a result, it can be used as a marketing tool, yet the use of the term when publicising a film does not mean that the film being publicised is governed by a production ethos different from the standard Hollywood product, with many of the films, but not necessarily all, being produced with an eye to maximising profit. Justin Wyatt's essay on "Marketing Marginalized Cultures" and with particular reference to *The Wedding Banquet* (1993) affirms:

> I would suggest that the release of *The Wedding Banquet* illustrates the increasing centrism of independent cinema, defined as any project not distributed by one of the majors. This centrism configures "independent" films that are more and more similar to the products from the major distributors, with parallels particularly striking in the added commercial and marketing hooks present in many independent films.
>
> (Wyatt, 67)

Centrism does not only concern the similarity of independent products to those of the majors, as suggested in the previous citation, but also concerns the way in which a film

uses traditional narrative expectations to create a product that involves a high degree of closure. Furthermore, it should be noted that so-called independent filmmakers are consciously pitching their product towards this centrist approach in order to guarantee a wider distribution of their films.

A pertinent example of this is *The Usual Suspects*, relevant not just because it was an independently-produced film and in the same generic area as *Following*, but more importantly because it was produced by the same company that would later produce *Memento*: Newmarket. While it cannot be denied that *The Usual Suspects* is an unusual film in terms of its narrative outcome (with crime definitely paying), it remains very much a film that does little to examine generic narrative expectations, which would suggest that it has been pitched as a film which is in keeping with standard Hollywood product, while its twist ending also supplies a very high degree of closure. This raises the question as to how far *Following* can be considered an independent film in the terms laid out above. It is certainly independent within the parameters suggested by Wyatt, as a major did not distribute it. Furthermore, in terms of financing and story telling, it is independent of the studio pressures to include or exclude scenes, dialogue and actors, since the film was financed and scripted by Nolan. It would appear therefore, that of the three feature films Nolan has made to date, it is *Following* that should most clearly reflect the director's artistic concerns, unencumbered as it is by boardroom "executive decisions", with Nolan free to make all those decisions himself.

However, this relationship between "independence" and a director's artistic concerns is a complicated one. It has been argued for example that Hitchcock made better films under the controlling auspices of David O. Selznick and the Studio System than he did after setting up his Transatlantic Pictures production company with Sidney Bernstein. The two films he made as an independent director, *Rope* (1948) and *Under Capricorn* (1949) have elements of technical brilliance with their very long takes, (a technique which was largely abandoned in the latter film), but this brilliance actually detracts from the narrative of the film and as a result draws attention to itself as a cinematic device. As a result, these films have been compared unfavourably with other Hitchcock films.

Yet any evaluation of whether a film is better or worse than any other film by a given director inevitably brings into play a system of subjective value judgements. While Nolan cannot be considered as a director with the same technical virtuosity and psychological depth as Hitchcock, it is inevitable that we compare Nolan's methods of production in all three of his feature films to date and conclude that *Following* is the most independent of the three feature films he has made so far, for the reasons given above.

This lack of dependence on authority and control is probably a situation that suits Nolan well, since his determination to be involved in all aspects of production[31] suggest that he is the person who seeks authority and wants to be in control, the latter a trait which is reflected in the protagonist of his three feature films. The paradox here of course is that these protagonists are characters who have their control either exposed as being fraudulent (*Memento*) or wrested away from them (*Following, Insomnia*). This could be said to reflect Nolan's decreasing control over the three films he has made to date as his career moves closer to the centre of Hollywood production.

In terms of the story it tells, *Following* is a continuation of the nineties director's interest in the tradition of the noir in cinema (cf. Fincher, Lynch, the Coen brothers *et al*.) It could therefore be said that since it contains mainstream generic elements of American film noir in particular, it has an eye to the American market. Notice that the film, while shot in London, has none of the expected London landmarks, which prevents the film from being too culturally specific and thereby broadens its possible market potential and also allows the setting to be more anonymous. However, it is impossible for *Following* to escape the cultural specificity of its location due to the characters' accents, which immediately identify them as English and, as will be examined later, in Cobb's case identify him with a particularly upper-middle class background.

[31] An example of this control can be seen in the following quote concerning Nolan's involvement with Hillary Seitz in the scripting of *Insomnia*, for which he is uncredited: "A lot of the changes we made together – *I supervised her writing, giving her notes, suggesting things* – were along the lines of trying to get inside the character's head… *I pushed Hillary in the direction* of allowing the audience to understand Will's actions more as he goes through the story." (My italics) Source: *Creative Screenwriting*. V9. n1. Jan/Feb 2002 p.52.

Furthermore with *Following*, Nolan can be said to be making a contribution to the 3rd cycle of film noir that includes fractured narratives, such as *Pulp Fiction* and *Lost Highway*, along with films with a twist in the tale such as *The Usual Suspects*, *The Game* or *Basic Instinct*. However, in *Following* Nolan has exploited rather than explored generic conventions and the possible commercial impact these conventions may have. Whilst original in certain aspects of its treatment of noir, *Following* is essentially a commercial film since it uses noir generic expectations and conventions in a way that is similar to such Major Studio films as *The Game* or *Jackie Brown* (1997). These aspects of the generic conventions of film noir and their representation as expressed in *Following* will be examined later.

If Nolan's independence is questionable in terms of the centrist product he has produced with *Following*, he is certainly more independent in relation to his use of budget and location. He has certainly made use of the budget and location restrictions when making *Following* and in this respect can be said to be closer to the spirit of the "no budget" independent movie as defined by Wyatt:

> Concurrent with the shrinking market for independent distributors was the founding in 1991 of a production company, Good Machine, by James Schamus and Ted Hope. Schamus and Hope based the company around the concept of "no-budget" production, enabling directors to work unrestrained by commercial determinants. As Schamus describes the modus operandi, "The budget is the aesthetic."
>
> (Wyatt, 63)

While Schamus and Hope were working with budgets of USD 500,000, a figure that would have seemed astronomical to Nolan when he was making *Following*; he had to make do with his USD 6,000 scraped together over the course of a year. Since the film was made with no final market defined or deadlines of production, it is indeed free from commercial constraints even though the content and tone of the film imply the familiar commercial aesthetic of the thriller while suggesting a degree of creative freedom. This dichotomy of restricted budget v. creative freedom is something that Nolan refers to in his interview with Stephen Garrett:

> "We could only do one or two takes of each shot because we only had enough money to shoot 15 minutes of film each weekend. I was always thinking about what we needed, like insert shots, and

> what shots we could jettison, so I was editing as we shot." Having a skeleton crew and just one or two actors for any given scene meant that everyone could pile into a London cab and potentially film anywhere. "The nice thing about *Following* was that we could be very spontaneous in the way that we shot," Nolan says, "because a lot of the locations were last-minute, and we didn't have any permits."
>
> (*Filmmaker*.v7.n3. Spring 1999 p.62)

This lack of finance does indeed lend the film a very specific aesthetic that compels Nolan to create a noir world as opposed to a realistic world:

> I saw the hand-held, black and white 16mm cinematography as a way of tapping into the cinematic feel of film noir, whilst giving it a different spin by shooting the scenes in a more documentary style. By operating the camera myself and by using minimal lighting, I was able to place the actor within each location in a relatively natural and interference-free environment.
>
> (www.christophernolan.net/following_making.php)

Nolan is therefore using the limited technology available to him in order to create a film whose aesthetic is dependent on and enhanced by its restricted budget. However, the documentary style of the film Nolan refers to is questionable, due to the non-chronological way in which the film is edited as well as the strong sense of closure in the film, when unravelled from its hall of mirrors narrative structure. If anything, the hand-held black and white cinematography that Nolan implies is documentary has more to do with the French *cinéma verité* of Goddard's *A Bout de Souffle* (1960) than the direct cinema documentary style of say Pennebaker's *Don't Look Back* (1967) or Wiseman's *High School* (1969).

What the film does share with the aforementioned examples, however, is a certain sixties feel. This is partly a result of the reasons Nolan has put forward, but it goes further than that. The sixties in England was a time when gangster figures were fashionable and it could be suggested that Cobb and the Young Man with their suits and attitude are tying into that milieu with a style that would not look out of place on the Kray twins. It should be mentioned that Nolan is not borrowing from the better-known *Lock Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* as a referent for its glamorisation of gangsters, sixties or otherwise, since this film was released in the same year as *Following*. Yet films such as *Dance with a Stranger* (1985), which gives an account of the events that

led to Ruth Ellis being the last woman to be hanged in Britain, and *The Krays* (1990) telling the story of the eponymous gangster twins, attest to the fact that recent British filmmakers have been interested in depicting British low-life of the fifties and sixties.

This allusion to the sixties in *Following* is not necessarily as fanciful as it may at first seem since James Theobald tells us that:

> Costumes were our own clothes. The suit that I wear is my Dad's wedding suit from the 1960s.
>
> (Nolan, 100)

Furthermore, the sixties can also be seen in the character of the Blonde with her dyed permed hair and, with her oscillation between wilfulness and fragility, she comes across as mix of Ruth Ellis and Marilyn Monroe, herself turned into a sixties icon by Andy Warhol. The latter of these two is overtly drawn attention to in the film: among the sparse decoration of the young man's flat is a postcard of Marilyn Monroe, thus subconsciously drawing a link in the spectator's mind between the appearance of the Blonde and Marilyn Monroe and their respective tragic outcomes as well as further linking the film to the sixties.

Nolan is taking advantage of technical and financial limitations to create a world that alludes not just to 60s Britain but also to 40s and 50s Hollywood versions of the underworld in America. The diegetic world of *Following* is one which is informed by the history of film noir and one which, if the scenes of the film are reordered from their chronological convolutions, very much has an eye to the traditions of the 1st cycle of film noir, with the isolated male out of his depth and the manipulative female with her own agenda. In these terms, the film can be placed in a tradition of film noir that stretches back to *Double Indemnity*.

Indeed Nolan's interest in the isolated male out of his depth is one that he has examined in all three of his feature films to date. However, his treatment of this theme differs greatly from the classic treatment of Hollywood's isolated hero. It is how Nolan explores this convention of film noir in *Following* and its necessary counterbalance, the *femme fatale*, which will be looked at next.

**Following Noir**

One of the central features of film noir is criminal ambition, whether it is Phyllis Deitrichson's desire to have her husband murdered for the insurance money in *Double Indemnity* or Lily Carver's desire to get the "Great Whatsit?" in *Kiss Me Deadly*. The criminal ambition of the Young Man in *Following* is far more mundane: a desire to follow people. His desire to follow people is a metaphor for his desire to be in control, the one watching, rather than out of control; the one watched. His initial behaviour of following people is thus an expression of not feeling in control and starts the cause and effect chain that will lead to the film's paranoid conclusion. He brings to mind the anonymity of a Kafka protagonist and his sense of being one step removed from the world. Here Kafka is writing in a short story called *The Businessman*:

> Just you follow the inconspicuous little man, and when you have pushed him into a doorway, rob him and then watch him, each with your hands in your pockets, as he goes sorrowfully on his way down the left-hand street.
>
> (Kafka, 22)

The Young Man of *Following* is therefore a little man, desperately trying to be in control of his environment yet with very little understanding of it. He is beaten and robbed in the film by Cobb who, it must be remembered, has been watching him before he was aware he was being watched and furthermore he is followed by the spectator, where the spectator is far more effective a voyeur than the Young Man will ever be. While his apparently innocent following of people is far less serious than Cobb's following him and the spectator following the Young Man, it does in fact allude to the far more serious implications of sexual and celebrity stalking, whether by paparazzi, with their supposedly legitimate agenda, or that of the lone stalker such as John Lennon's assassin Mark Chapman or John Hinckley, whose obsession with Jody Foster after seeing her in *Taxi Driver* (1976) led him to take Travis Bickle's attempt to assassinate the fictional candidate Palantine to its perverse logical extreme when he tried to assassinate Ronald Reagan in 1981. The paradox of the Young Man's stalking is that while he starts the activity so that he can feel in control; he is quickly

manipulated by the people he has chosen to follow, rather than the other way round, which suggests that his role is as the classic noir patsy or fall guy.

This initial transgression from the socially accepted codes of behaviour naturally leads the Young Man to further, more serious transgressions, where he is incapable of being proactive in the situation he finds himself in. While he feels, not unlike the paparazzi, that it is perfectly acceptable to invade a person's public space by following them, he baulks at the notion of invading their private space when Cobb first suggests burglary. Yet, in filmic terms and possibly in reality, the one is a logical extension of the other and naturally raises questions as to what extent the paparazzi are licensed stalkers and at what point their stalking ceases to be legal.

His ineptitude as a burglar is apparent. The one burglary he sets up is of his own flat, an environment where we are all proactive, whereas either Cobb or the Blonde initiates all other acts of transgression, suggesting that he is reacting to rather than creating scenarios. His complete failure at fencing the stolen goods also gives weight to the notion that he is a helpless passive figure. Since his function in the film is essentially that of a patsy, he bears a certain similarity to Wilmer in *The Maltese Falcon*. Both are initially caught in the act of following, neither is capable of understanding the world within which they are moving, yet each thinks they do and each suffers the fate of being set up for crimes they have not committed. In the Young Man we have a protagonist who would not call himself a criminal but is defined as such by the crimes he will be charged with. The Young Man's isolation from those around him is evident both at the beginning and end of the filmic events presented. He starts the narrative as an isolated young man, whether through choice or lack of social skills is not made clear, who is prepared to follow people as a way of getting human contact, whereas he ends the film isolated from the world in a police cell.

Within the Young Man's own perception of events, his one proactive act, the breaking into the safe of the Bald Guy (the gangster), is actually one that he has been manoeuvred into by the Blonde and for purposes other than the ones she or he knows about. This is therefore a reflection of the male protagonist as depicted in classic film noir: willingly made to do things that would normally be against his nature. The male

protagonist in classic film noir, even if he is supposedly the tough hero, is actually more a reactive than proactive character. This, in turn, undermines his masculinity, which is only ambiguously reassumed with the resolution of the film. An example of this can be seen in *Maltese Falcon* where it is Mary Astor's character who starts off the filmic chain of events that Sam Spade has to react to with Humphrey Bogart only reasserting control in the last seconds of the film as he arranges for O'Shaughnessy's arrest, thus ensuring the ordered fictional world of classic Hollywood is restored. Within this context the Young Man fits this generic convention, since he is manipulated into performing acts outside the contract he has agreed to. Just as O'Shaughnessy hires Spade for a specific task, the limits of which are soon exceeded, so the Young Man establishes rules for following individuals that are soon broken. Whereas 1st cycle noir depends on the male's attraction to the female to start the reactive chain of events (at a certain level these actions are actually quite chivalrous in nature), *Following* depends on the Young Man being attracted to both Cobb and the Blonde, suggesting a degree of ambivalence in his sexuality that the film fails to explore to any depth.

However, the relationship between the Young Man and Cobb can be seen as an example of the relationship between the protagonist and the *homme fatal* that Nolan develops in his later feature films. The narrative thread of *Following* is dependent on the Young Man being attracted to Cobb, just as the events of almost any 1st and 2nd cycle noir are dependent on the protagonist being attracted to the *femme fatale*. Without this attraction the events of the film would not take place. The attraction of the Young Man to Cobb goes as far as for him to take on his identity almost in an act of homoerotic hero worship. That Cobb ultimately destroys the Young Man is a further reference to the way in which the protagonist is ultimately destroyed by the *femme fatale* in 1st and 2nd cycle noir.

It is at this point some mention should be made to the names[32] of the characters in the film. The Young Man informs Cobb and the spectator that his name is Bill and later on signs a stolen credit card as Daniel Lloyd. This latter can immediately be dismissed as

[32] Paradoxically, given the care with which his characters are named in all his films, Nolan claims not to be interested in names *per se* claiming they are: "one of the things I don't like in terms of human behaviour, many films I think use people's names too much. www.ifp.org/interviews. This in itself is ironic, given one of the running jokes in *Memento* is Leonard correcting everybody who insists on calling him "Lenny."(See page 104). This belief could perhaps be used as evidence to support the claim that Nolan is a director interested in formalist rather than humanist issues.

his real name, since the credit card in question is stolen. In fact, it can be assumed that neither of these names is his real name since he is listed in both the credits to the film and the screenplay as the Young Man, which suggests that he is the ingénue Everyman. In fact, none of the characters in the film, except Cobb, is listed by name but rather by type. Therefore, we have the Blonde, the Bald Guy, the Homeowner and so on. This effectively removes their personality and leads the spectator to identify with them as types or signifiers. This is particularly relevant with the Blonde, whose character type will be discussed later. As previously mentioned there is one character who is named and that is Cobb. It can be assumed, because of his duplicitous nature and the lack of names for the other characters that this is a false name, which means that we are watching a film where none of the characters' names are reliably fixed. This not only reinforces the idea that the characters are acting as character types within the conventions of film noir, but also shows the care with which Nolan names, or in this case does not name, his characters: from the insomniac Dormer in *Insomnia*, through the shell of a man that is Leonard Shelby in *Memento*, back to the inexperienced man known as the Young Man in *Following*, with the emphasis being on the young[33].

A name is the basis for constructing a personality and since these characters have no names it is the spectator's unavoidable task to try and pin down a character using both visual and oral cues. By undermining the spectator's attempt to do this, Nolan is very much working within the growing tradition of 3rd cycle film noir, where the spectator is removed from purely subjective identification with the events on the screen, a model which had been encouraged by the classic film text. Cynthia Baron refers to this subjective identification as follows:

> As originally formulated by Jacques-Alain Miller, suture names the process whereby a thinking and speaking "subject is "stitched" into the chain of discourse" (Stam *et al*. 1992: 169). Miller proposed that while philosophers from Descartes to Husserl have argued for the validity of the cogito (the principle that awareness of one's own thoughts is evidence of one's existence), subjectivity is in fact produced by the miscognition that one has a "real" and "unique" identity.
>
> (Baron, 22)

[33] It is interesting to note that Nolan has chosen one word titles for all three of his films to date, each giving a very clear indication of what the content of the film will be.

Since Nolan's characters lack that basic unit of a "real" and "unique" identity: a name, then the spectator is further "unstitched" from the discourse of the film and encouraged to view the film more objectively as a piece of filmed fiction and not an imaginary world that we can lose ourselves in. This notion is supported if we take into account the fact that Nolan is working with unknown actors. This means that the spectator does not have the referent of a previous film the actors might have played in to try and establish a link with the character. In other words, the anonymity of the actors further delineates the anonymity expressed within the film.

In *Following*, this lack of names or giving of false names shows that, within the world these characters inhabit, nothing can be taken at face value and that everyone is lying. This even goes so far as a minor character, the Homeowner, who interrupts Cobb and the Young Man in an act of burglary as she returns home with a man who is not her partner. Cobb draws attention to the fact that her apparent lack of concern about their presence is a cover-up for her lying about the situation she finds herself in.

Lying as the only means of communication is signposted in the first exchange between the Young Man and Cobb:

> YOUNG MAN: NO! No, I, I, I, I'm a …. Look, I saw you on the street and…. And you reminded me of someone I went to school with – to tell you the truth I thought you were him, so I followed you and came in here – I came in here 'cos I was hungry – but I wanted to see if it was him…
>
> (Nolan, 11)

Cobb and the spectator see through this stammered reply as the lie that it is, yet it sets the tone for both their relationship and the relationship the Young Man has with the Blonde and indeed all relationships in the film.

Leading on from this, the first exchange between the Young Man and the Blonde naturally contains a lie but also indicates the dominance of the Blonde over the Young Man as he approaches her in a nightclub with his clichéd opener:

> YOUNG MAN: Buy you a drink?
> THE BLONDE: Yeah, but you can't sleep with me.

(Nolan, 17)

Such a frank reply would not suit the production code *femme fatales* of the forties or fifties but is entirely in keeping with what Kate Stables calls:

> Open and aggressively sexual female speech is a radical subversion of the usual order of language and seduction.

(Stables, 175)

As the Young Man initiates the usual chat up game, the Blonde has pre-empted his thoughts, thereby automatically gaining the upper hand by reducing the Young Man to the position of neophyte, both in terms of his understanding of women and as a protagonist in a film noir.

However, while she may be a 3rd cycle *femme fatale* in her language and casually achieved dominance over the protagonist, she is very much a traditional *femme fatale* both in appearance and her eventual demise. It has already been commented on that physically she can be seen as a cross between Ruth Ellis, (a real-life *femme fatale*) and Marilyn Monroe, but there are filmic antecedents such as Lana Turner's Cora Smith in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and Barbara Stanwyck's Phyllis Dietrichson in *Double Indemnity*, who, as a result of their transgressions from the social norms defined by Hollywood, have to die at the end of their respective films.

If the Blonde's opening exchange posits her as a 3rd cycle *femme fatale*, conscious of her sexuality and aware of its effect on men and, most importantly, speaking overtly rather than covertly about who she does or does not want sexually, her demise ties her into the wider tradition of the *femme fatale*: the Blonde who must pay for her transgression. She is not the successful, sexually dominant murderer of Sharon Stone's character in *Basic Instinct*. Stables describes this modern *femme fatale* as follows:

> Potentially the most fascinating new feature of the *femme fatale* is her ability to *avoid textual suppression*, to win on her own terms.

(Stables, 171)

The “textual suppression” being referred to is the inevitable death of the *femme fatale* figure in traditional film noir written into the normally male-authored text. Within this context, the Blonde fits very clearly this type of *femme fatale* figure, suppressed at the end of the film, suggesting that *Following* is merely a continuation of the traditional tropes and narrative consequences of film noir, continuing the male-dominated point of view apparent in most films. While *Following* may question notions of contemporary masculinity, as will be seen later, its treatment of the Blonde is that of sex object to be used by men, specifically Cobb and the Bald Guy and, to a lesser extent, the Young Man. She seems rather a token decorative item in a male-centred form, further suggesting that the key relationship in the film is that of the Young Man and Cobb, or the protagonist/*homme fatal*, a relationship more alluded to than fully explored.

However, within the context of *Following*, the Blonde can be said to be the only person who tells the truth. This filmic truth is indicated in the only scene of the film that is a flashback from a perspective other than that of the Young Man. While the action of the film jumps between its three time-lines, which are introduced through the voiceover at the beginning of the film and are therefore from the point of view of the Young Man, the only scene that is a genuine flashback, in the usual sense of a voiceover introducing prior action, is the one involving the Blonde where she describes the murder of the Accountant. Since the spectator sees the event in flashback as it is being told to the Young Man, the spectator assumes that this event has occurred within the film’s diegesis.

The presupposition at work here is that the truth of any given lie in film noir is revealed in flashback a character might lie directly to another character and, by implication, to the spectator. But the flashback reveals a truth that is only available to the spectator, since the other characters cannot share the spectator’s perspective. The veracity of the Blonde’s flashback is confirmed in the film’s denouement when Cobb reveals that he has been hired by the Bald Man to kill her because she witnessed the killing of the Accountant. This singular use of the flashback in *Following* is yet another of the narrative strategies Nolan uses to suggest the traditional genre of film noir and thus places his film within the centrist tradition of Hollywood storytelling, with centrist here being storytelling that guides the spectator to a preconceived conclusion.

Nolan also uses the voiceover as a way of conforming to the generic conventions of film noir. The opening line of the film, heard in voiceover, is "The following is my explanation…well, my…my account of …. Well, what happened." This clearly indicates the confessional nature of the voiceover, with the religious and social implication of confessing to the father (figure)[34]. This voiceover also signals the flashback nature of the entire film from that moment of filmic present as being a repetition of the device such as the one used in films like *Double Indemnity*, while also introducing the subjective point of view of a narrative told almost exclusively through the eyes of the Young Man, again mirroring the structure of *Double Indemnity*.

However, this confessional conceit is only partially successful in *Following*, since the spectator is privileged to information that the Young Man is not. While *Double Indemnity* only departs once from its strict flashback subjective point-of-view structure, to show Dietrichson hiding the gun prior to Neff's arrival for her murder scene, *Following* and its entire denouement is dependent on a departure from the confessional voiceover. In fact, all scenes between Cobb and the Blonde depart from the voiceover confessional, but in particular it is the aforementioned denouement, as Cobb explains to the Blonde and, by implication, the spectator why she must die, which allows the spectator to understand events that the Young Man is unaware of. This digression from the rigid narrative perspective of the voiceover and its subjective narrator that the film supposedly uses would be far more obvious if the film's narrative had been presented chronologically, perhaps suggesting that Nolan's non-chronological ordering of events is actually a strategy to cover up flaws in the handling of narrative devices used in the film, even though this strategy is in keeping with other 3rd cycle film noir films of the nineties.

As it is, the denouement takes place within the narrative weave as a counterbalance to or contradiction of the Young Man's opening line of dialogue. Cobb is telling us what really happened and why it happened, thereby allowing the spectator to be more informed than the Young Man. He is effectively caught with his trousers down and

[34] This is further reinforced if we remember that the father confessor figure in the film, the Police Officer, is actually played by Nolan's uncle!

hung out to dry[35]. Since Cobb's explanation is presented near the end of the film's running time and the chronological order of events as presented in the film, this has the effect of offering a very strong sense of closure that contradicts the way in which the film has been presented. This is something that Nolan himself is aware of:

> *Following* has a very tight conclusion. I have to confess – as was pointed out in a very good review I read of the film on-line – that the tidy ending runs somewhat counter to the kind of puzzling ambiguity that's there the whole way through the film. There's a sense in which that's true; there's a flourish at the end of the film that tidies things up.
>
> (Nolan, 98)

It is as if Nolan is afraid to allow an open ending that does not supply the spectator with all the answers and is reverting to the traditional Classic narrative technique of closing all narrative plots and subplots within the resolution of the film. This in turn suggests that Nolan lacked the courage of his convictions in this, his first feature film, where intelligibility not just for the spectator, but also for any potential distributors must be of primary concern to the filmmaker. Another case in point would be Darren Aronofsky's first feature *Pi* (1998), which was undermined by the very strong sense of closure that ran counter to not just the events seen in the film's 85 minutes but also the recurring nature of the eponymous figure at the heart of the film.

## Following Paranoia

According to the Internet Movie Database, the tagline for *Following* is "You're Never Alone." While this could be the tagline for either a feel-good Hollywood movie or a horror movie, it is obviously in the present case an allusion to the paranoia that is the main theme of the film. The use of the second person pronoun is also directed at the audience, suggesting we too are part of the paranoia. This clearly positions the film within that postmodern interest in the anonymity of modern living, the resulting anomie and its implied paranoia.

[35] The text has sunk to the level of cliché because both these clichés are depicted visually in the film. As the young man is finding a way to carry out the money he has stolen from the Bald Guy he pulls down his trousers and starts strapping money to his thighs. At this moment he is discovered by the man he will attack. This notion of the visual pun is repeated later, or earlier, after Cobb has beaten him up on the rooftop. We see the Young Man crumpled in a heap on the rooftop. The scene then cuts to a shot of Cobb walking away through a line of drying washing.

Modern filmmakers use the disjointed narrative as a way of expressing this paranoia at a structural level, thus encouraging the spectator to make their own connections. While paranoia is normally considered to be a condition of delusion and the territory of an unstable minority, 3rd cycle noir filmmaking, through structural devices, seeks to argue that it is a more general state. As Barry Laga says:

> The Paranoid may feel that everything is connected, but it does not mean that the paranoid is mistaken.
>
> (Laga, 194)

The postmodern condition seems to suggest that paranoia is a state of normality, not abnormality, while the postmodern interest in seeking connections between past and present texts is little different to the paranoid's interest in making connections, imaginary or otherwise. The spectator's need to make connections between the diverse, fractured elements of plot and narrative in 3rd cycle film noir encourages the spectator to exert a degree of control over the film that they do not have in post-Kafkaesque, pre-Apocalyptic modern living. Sense is not always made, suggesting that fractured narratives are a more accurate reflection of the way life is lived than the classic film text that Hollywood still promotes.

However, even to a male writing about a film that focuses on a male protagonist in crisis, Marita Sturken's observations are particularly relevant to the argument I am proposing:

> The 1990s saw a fascination in popular culture with paranoid narratives… This new version of paranoia, which is distinct in many ways from the 1950s paranoia that centred on the external threat of communism, is inextricably tied to contemporary discourses about race and identity, and the emergence of the white male as a figure in crisis.
>
> (Sturken, 204)

It has already been suggested that Nolan's treatment of the Blonde is only a partially complete reworking of the traditional *femme fatale* figure in a contemporary context. However, his treatment of the Young Man does indeed resemble the 3rd cycle noir interest in the male in crisis. Here is a man who is manipulated at every turn by forces

he does not understand or even have any awareness of, once again bringing Kafka and his Josef K to mind. Furthermore, the paranoia present in *Following* does not have an external political allegorical target, as did the films of the fifties Sturken alludes to, like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1955), where the paranoia depicted is directed at a political system at odds with capitalism. It is very much the internal paranoia of the individual in the context of contemporary capitalistic living or rather the artistic or intellectual understanding and depiction of that paranoia that is being explored. What is ironic, as far as the paranoia in *Following* is concerned, is that the Young Man is actually trying to tell the truth, as seen through the use of flashback for reasons given earlier, but manages to come across as paranoid in the film. This is due to the extreme degree of character manipulation involved as can be seen in Cobb's discussion of the Young Man with the Blonde.

Further attention has to be paid to Cobb, who silently disappears at the end of the film having taken on the appearance of classless anonymity. Yet his well-educated voice and smart clothing clearly place him as a representative of the capitalist, entrepreneurial system. He is entrepreneurial in his approach to his work. The Young Man, whether out of hero worship or simply a desire to improve himself, tries to emulate Cobb, both through criminal method and appearance. He is doomed to fail of course, because he is not part of the system of which Cobb is an astute representative. His position as an outsider is clearly signalled through his appearance and the garret-type flat in which he lives. He is a character from another age: a Dickensian petty criminal living in a Kafkaesque criminal world of rules he does not understand, a romantic with dreams of being a writer. This latter is attested to by Cobb as he and the Young Man rob the Young Man's flat and Cobb notices the antiquated typewriter:

> Cobb: If he wanted to write he'd have a word processor. He doesn't want to write, he wants to be a writer.

The Young Man's mode of technology, whether out of choice or financial necessity, clearly shows that he is out of step with modern society and is therefore open to being manipulated by it. Yet his rejection of modern technology can also be read metaphorically as a postmodernist rejection of technology being capable of supplying positive solutions as referred to in the introduction.

The film ends with the Young Man's probable realisation that Cobb, who is a representative of the well-spoken, anonymous dominant order, has manipulated him. This in turn suggests the film is a tale of innocence, or rather of the loss of innocence. As Sturken points out in:

> One of paranoia's defining features is its dependence on a state of innocence. Paranoia follows the moment when we were innocent, unknowing, and believing in the good. It is the result of the bitter shock that comes from having been naïve about structures of power.
>
> (Sturken, 207)

While the Young Man probably realises at the end of the film that the truth he speaks will merely confirm his paranoia in the eyes of society, the spectator approaches the end of the film with the realisation that the paranoid spectatorial journey of seeking connections between the filmic events has been completed. The spectator can return to their anonymity with some grains of comfort. As Sturken puts it:

> Narratives of paranoia are most often read as culturally disruptive stories that powerfully evoke the alienation of everyday life and the terror of citizenship. Yet it is also possible to see them as providing a particular form of comfort. Paranoid structures assert structure where there is none. They see master plans in the arbitrariness of everyday life.
>
> (Sturken, 207)

Within this context, the very narrative structure of *Following* is thus a way for the spectator to assert control over the story by finally making rational connections between the events in the film. The disjointed narrative therefore acts as a model for modern paranoia, implying that the modern world is paranoid and manipulative. The eventual understanding of the conspiracy at the heart of the narrative gives closure and release from paranoia to the spectator. The strong sense of closure in the film is thus a panacea to the spectator's paranoia within the context of the film.

If paranoia is a condition of modern living then the Young Man in *Following* can be said to be an Everyman figure for the contemporary citizen - anonymous and unnoticed, while essentially paranoid and seeking control:

> Freud defined paranoia as an aspect of narcissism and linked it to the "delusion of being noticed." This is crucial in relation to citizenship, for who is the citizen but someone who is rarely noticed, who is absented from public debates.
>
> (Sturken, 208)

The Young Man's willingness to follow, literally and metaphorically, Cobb's path can now be seen as an act of recognition. He is finally a person, specifically male, who has been noticed and is prepared to forgo his romantic notion of writing in favour of accepting the norms suggested by Cobb. Cobb, as has been stated, is the embodiment of modern anonymous controlling forces and the Young Man is delighted to have been finally recognised and to have escaped his anonymity. The paradox lies in the fact that the very escape from anonymity is what leads to his loss of innocence and paranoia, thereby suggesting that anonymity is desirable since recognition leads to downfall. The audience can therefore leave the film comforted in their anonymity and paranoia, only to be reintroduced to the themes in Nolan's next film, *Memento*. How these themes are approached will be examined in the next chapter.

## Connecting Nolan

*Following* becomes more interesting when compared with the films Nolan has made since, for it introduces a number of themes, narrative techniques and stylistic strategies that are developed in both *Memento* and *Insomnia*. In this respect it could be said to be a forerunner of his next two films. Aspects of this blueprint will now be looked at.

The most obvious similarity between *Following* and *Memento* is the disjointed narrative structure. *Following* has its three time-lines that the spectator has to reassemble. This process of recomposing the story is actually quite straightforward, as we are given signs through the appearance of the Young Man as to where we are in the narrative chain. We see the Young Man with long hair, the Young Man with short hair and the Young Man with short hair beaten and bloodied. These three distinct phases of chronology, with their easily identifiable signs indicate to the spectator that one stage comes before or after another stage within the film's running time, thus allowing the spectator to piece together the order of the events.

What is not signalled to the spectator is why there are the three distinct phases and what their purpose is in terms of narrative structure and what they reveal about the characters and themes of the film. Yet much of the pleasure of watching the film for the first time comes from establishing the cause-and-effect link between the three phases. Nevertheless, repeated viewings of the film can fail to add other layers or subtexts to the strategy, suggesting that this strategy is not one that enriches elements of the narrative and, therefore, merely works at the level of metonymy, suggesting the way the Young Man has been manipulated by the characters in the film is similar to the way the filmmaker manipulates the audience. However, since all films manipulate the audience there is nothing particularly striking in this approach.

*Memento* is far more successful in its non-chronological approach to narrative where the spectator is forced to identify (with) and question the process of memory through Leonard's unreliable method of recording facts. While Nolan gives the spectator visual clues as to where he or she is in the narrative chain, such as the change in clothing, the scratch on Leonard's face and the use of black and white or colour film, the spectator's position in relation to where they are in the narrative is far less obvious than in *Following*, thus clouding narrative expectations and confounding the spectator's feelings towards Leonard. This, in turn, forces the spectator to question not just Leonard's but their own version of events, with each spectator drawing their own conclusions as to what the filmic truth is. The success of the film lies in there being no clear right answer, unlike the clear conclusion of *Following*. The film, therefore, successfully works at a metaphorical level by encouraging the multi-understandings and memories to suggest that real life is also one of fractured memories and half-truths, which we attempt to put in order so as to make sense of the world.

The spectator is further unsettled in *Following* and *Memento* and to a lesser extent in *Insomnia*, through Nolan's non-use of establishing shots. The spectator is thrust straight into the heart of the action, disorientated by the lack of visual clues as to where the action is taking place. The traditional Hollywood film guides the spectator through the establishing shot of, say, a police station, and thus grounds the spectator in the unity and consistency of setting. This lack of establishing shots started off in *Following* as an economic necessity:

> Not a syllable is wasted (nor indeed a frame of film, with Nolan rejecting establishing shots), a fact that is undoubtedly partially testament to restrictive conditions under which the film was made.
>
> (Mottram in Nolan, 94)

Even though the budget of *Memento* was small by Hollywood standards, such stringent restrictions of budget were not operative when *Memento* was being made and within this film the lack of establishing shots unsettles the spectator even more. As a result, the strategy serves the film as a method of drawing attention to Leonard's condition and interpretation of facts and the way in which the spectator's memory functions. An example of this is the scene that starts with Leonard holding a whisky bottle as he awaits the return of Dodd to the hotel room. Since no filmic reference has been previously made to the whisky bottle nor any establishing shot given to contextualise either it or where Leonard is, the spectator is immediately as disorientated as Leonard and drawn to hypothesise based on these uncertainties.

*Insomnia* does use establishing shots far more frequently, perhaps because it is a more mainstream Hollywood film with A-list stars and big budget expectations or perhaps because Nolan wants to show the stunning Alaskan location. However, it does continue the strategy introduced in *Memento* of the rapid flash, where the spectator is presented with flashes that seemingly have no link with the narrative. The lack of establishing cues for these flashbacks, such as voiceover or fading of image, is a creative development of the lack of establishing shots which economic necessity dictated in *Following*, while both strategies have the effect of distancing the spectator from traditional narrative expectations.

These techniques serve the purpose of creating an intellectual rather than emotional filmic experience, since the spectator is continually forced to question their position in relation to his films rather than to be taken over by the filmic events. This suggests that Nolan is a filmmaker more interested in process than people; a view that is supported once again in Stephen Garrett's interview with Nolan, where he describes his feelings on being robbed prior to the making of *Following*:

> "The robbers had taken all my CDs," says Nolan, "and had used one of my bags to take some of the stuff. I found that kind of detail fascinating. And I also found that feeling of invasion – it's kind of a cliché, but that idea of having your space violated – extremely powerful.
>
> (*Filmmaker*, 62)

While it may be a tradition of art to turn personal experience into artistic expression, the degree with which Nolan is capable of analysing his feelings suggest a man who intellectualises rather than emotes, objectifies rather than subjectifies; traits which his protagonists, particularly Leonard, also share and one which he seems keen to encourage in the spectator as a result of the techniques he uses to tell his stories.

As a development of this, it can be seen that the protagonists in his films have more in common than a degree of objectivity. Nolan has introduced in *Following* a type of protagonist that would be developed in his next two films. All three are loners out of their normal environment, having to react to situations over which they have no control. This similarity between the three characters is indicated at the level of camera work with extreme close ups, signifying spectator identification/alienation with the protagonist and point of view shots as well as at the level of dialogue:

> YOUNG MAN: I spotted the dangers soon enough. I could tell I was hooked and I made up rules. I wouldn't let myself follow anyone for too long. I wouldn't follow women after dark… The most important rule was that even if I found out where a person worked or lived, I would never follow the same person twice.
>
> (*Following*)

> LEONARD: The cops don't catch a killer by sitting around remembering stuff. They collect facts, make notes, draw conclusions. Facts, not memories: that's how you investigate.
>
> (*Memento*)

> DORMER: Be sure about the facts before you file this thing… Remember it's details.
>
> (*Insomnia*)

The three characters are linked by their interest in rules, facts and details. That each of them transgress the rules they have established for themselves or, in Dormer's words, have "crossed the line", a line which is an echo from *Following*, suggests that Nolan is

interested in how the existential individual interacts with society and, in particular, when that individual crosses the line and breaks society's rules. Each of the characters' obsession with rules and the transgression of them also calls to mind the ludic element of life, where the game is more important than the result or the process more important than the outcome. Leonard's process of finding a revenge target is inherently flawed yet he needs it to establish some form of meaning in his life, while Dormer's insistence that Ellie Burr implicate him in the killing of his partner suggest that the rules of the game must be obeyed even if in the process his reputation is ruined. Only the Young Man is unaware that his transgression of the rules has led him into a new, more criminal game the rules of which he does not know. This interest in rules and games is also a reflection of the way in which Nolan plays with the expectations of genre and narrative and once more suggests his greater interest in process rather than people.

## CHAPTER THREE – NOLAN'S INDEPENDENT AMERICAN FILM

## NARRATIVE AND MEMORY IN *MEMENTO*

### Lenny's Synopsis

So, where are you? I'm Leonard Shelby. I'm from San Francisco. I guess I've told you about my condition. I have no memory. I hope my condition won't be a problem to you. It's not amnesia. I remember everything from before my injury. I just can't make any new memories. Please call me Leonard. My wife called me Lenny. The world doesn't disappear when you close your eyes, does it? My actions still have a meaning, even if I can't remember them. My wife deserves vengeance. I go on facts, not recommendations. Something feels wrong. I think someone's fucking with me. Trying to get me to kill the wrong guy. My wife's death. I've found you, you fuck. Now where was I?

(Collaged from the screenplay of *Memento*)

### Synopsis

Christopher Nolan's *Memento* (2000) tells the story of the following events related now in their chronological order but not in the order they appear in the film. Leonard Shelby (Guy Pearce) is a seemingly happily married insurance investigator from San Francisco whose first big case involves Sammy Jankis (Stephen Tobolowsky) who has supposedly lost his short-term memory as a result of a car crash and therefore makes an insurance claim. Leonard discovers that he is a fraud. At around the same time, his house is burgled and his wife attacked. When going to rescue his wife Catherine (Jorja Fox), Leonard kills one of the attackers and is hit on the head by the other. As a result of this accident, he loses his short-term memory or rather the ability to make new memories and is condemned to live in a tape-loop version of a perpetual present that he cannot remember for more than ten minutes. His wife dies, and Leonard wants revenge for his wife's death. The original arresting officer Teddy (Joe Pantoliano) decides to help Leonard in his quest and between them they set up the killer for Leonard to kill. However, Leonard has no memory of the event so, through the collusion of Teddy and his own willingness to find a purpose for living, they set up various criminals for Leonard to feel the momentary satisfaction of revenge while Teddy makes financial

gain. The film relates the events of two of these killings: the first involving a local drug dealer Jimmy (Larry Holden), and the second Teddy himself. Teddy is set up as a target partly because of Leonard's need for a target and partly through the assistance of Jimmy's girlfriend, Natalie, (Carrie-Anne Moss), who suspects Teddy's involvement in the death of her boyfriend and herself wants revenge for it. The events of the film end and start at the moment when Leonard kills Teddy, whereas the film itself ends when Leonard has decided to set Teddy up as his next target.

**Events Reorganised**

The synopsis has been presented twice to illustrate the duplicitous manner in which the spectator is made to watch the film; while we identify with Leonard because he is the protagonist he is also manipulating us. However, as a plot the events shown above are entirely in keeping with the generic expectations of film noir and would not necessarily warrant the critical and popular attention that *Memento* has received. They very strongly suggest the standard generic fare of film noir, with a number of basic tropes from film noir being present: a mid-thirties single male with some claims to being an investigator; an apparent *femme fatale* with reasons of her own for interacting with the loner investigator and a louche supporting cast of characters also with their own duplicitous reasons for being involved with the protagonist.

What has warranted the critical and popular acclaim the film has received is its narrative structure. The film has been described by various critics as the backwards film[36] due to the impression people get that the film is being told backwards. In fact, the only part of the film that is, strictly speaking, seen as going backwards in time is the opening scene involving the death of Teddy. The rest of the film involves a rigid organisation of alternating black and white chronologically ordered sequences inter-spliced with colour sequences that are cut together in reverse order to what would logically be expected. The film finally merges black and white and colour as the two storylines meet with the death of Jimmy. It is this structure that has allowed the film to

[36] The Movie Review Query Engine offered 235 reviews of *Memento*. Three of the first four English-language reviews described *Memento* as follows: Chicago Sun-Times, "We begin at the end and work our way back forward toward the beginning, because the story is told backward." (Roger Ebert); Reel Views, "Nolan has elected to tell the story backwards." (James Berardinelli); The Washington Post, "Newcomer Christopher Nolan tells the story backwards." (Rita Kempley).

escape the stigma of standard generic fare and let Nolan explore the notions of spectator memory and time within the film's framework.

This chapter examines how Nolan has exploited both generic and narrative conventions to explore the process of memory, both in general terms - how we remember and more specifically - how we remember events in a film and are manipulated into generating filmic truth. There will also be a discussion of how memory and history are perceived in postmodern theory. However, before generic aspects of the film and the organisational elements of the narrative within the main body of the film are reviewed, the opening backwards sequence needs to be looked at both for its purpose and possible metaphoric content.

## The Opening of *Memento*

The French academic, Marc Vernet, in his essay, "The Filmic Transaction: On the Openings of Film Noir" has stated that the first two scenes in a film noir[37] can be called the *mise en place* and the "black hole" where the former sets the scene and suggests an ordered world and the latter suggesting an event that disrupts the seeming equilibrium of the former:

> The gap between the two movements is an asyndeton: a rupture in the chain of significations where the spectator feels as if he has somehow skipped a necessary logical step. The bridge between the two movements has escaped him; the second (black hole) does not appear to be logically derived from the first (*mise en place*). There is a disconnection, a gap, where the spectator feels the absence of a necessary structural relation.
>
> (Vernet, 65)

What Nolan has done, however, is to reverse this pattern in the opening two scenes of *Memento.* First we see the "black hole", the break from order with the opening sequence shown in reverse and the character coming back to life. This sequence contradicts both our commonly accepted notions of time and the opening sequences of a film, since there is no apparent or logical reason for the events to unfold backwards and there are no establishing shots to fix the spectator in location. In the second scene

[37] Vernet is specifically referring to *The Maltese Falcon, Double Indemnity, The Big Sleep, The Lady from Shanghai,* (1948) and *Out of The Past.*

the spectator is given the *mise en place*, the seemingly ordered world in a recognisable time frame of a motel room and a waking Leonard. The spectator knows that there is a causal link between the two scenes because the same character is in both. Vernet supports this notion:

> In this, the openings of film noirs reprise an essential feature of the dream-work as described by Freud who explains that if two contiguous images appear without any apparent logical relation between them, their simple succession will nevertheless indicate that a causal relation exists between them.
>
> (Vernet, 65)

In view of what has been shown on the screen, (the backwards sequence and a man waking up in a motel room), a logical supposition would be that the man has woken up from a dream. This could therefore suggest that all colour sequences in the film are dream sequences, with the black and white sequence being the film's present. What is important, however, is that, regardless of the filmic conjunction between the characters and content of the two scenes, the spectator will attempt to make a causal, logical conjunction between the two both in terms of the relationship between the two scenes and their relationship with the scenes that follow.

With this in mind, when faced with this opening, or "black hole" scene, the spectator will speculate on a number of questions that fit into the standard expositional scene of a generic detective film or film noir which enable the spectator to identify (with) the protagonist as quickly as possible. In the case of *Memento*, how have the two people come to be in that warehouse? Why is one of them taking a picture of the dead body? Why has one shot the other and, in terms of the storytelling process, why has the opening sequence of the film been shown backwards? Nolan is immediately giving us clues as to both the connectedness of the events of the film and the manner in which they will be told. We presume that the relationship between the person shot and the person doing the shooting will be explained during the course of the film and it is also signposted that the method through which the events of the film will be told might be a reversal of a more formulaic film, at least in terms of narrative structure.

The strangeness of the opening is further heightened by the fact that the figure we presume to be the protagonist is not one that is readily recognisable as a star. Before *Memento* was released Guy Pearce was best known for his work in *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of The Desert* (1994) and *L.A. Confidential*. While both were successful films Guy Pearce was still very much a B-list actor, in terms of star persona. *Memento* uses his relative anonymity to good effect: if the character of Leonard had been played by Brad Pitt, who was the original choice for the role, the spectator's presuppositions as to the type of character he was playing would have been far more clearly defined, while the character of Leonard would also have been significantly altered by the fact that a different actor, with different perceptions, would have been fleshing out the part.[38]

There is one more comment to be made about the opening scene in the warehouse. While it is the opening of the 113 minutes of the film *Memento*, it is, chronologically, the end of the spectator's interaction with Leonard. The events as related in the synopsis have come to an end and Leonard, by killing Teddy, has removed all links with his past. No longer does he have the hand of Teddy to steer him for whatever Machiavellian purposes. It is interesting to conjecture on what happens to Leonard after this killing. If it can be argued that Teddy is a further example of the *homme fatal*, having used Leonard for his own criminal purposes both during and before the diegesis of the film, and, as is the case with 1st cycle protagonist/*femme fatale*, the destiny of the two is inextricably linked, Leonard then has no choice but to commit suicide. This would therefore allow a closure of the "ideological contradictions" referred to in chapter one of this thesis.

**Order Disrupted**

It has been suggested above that Nolan's reversal of the *mise en place* and "black hole" opening scenes, as proposed by Vernet, seeks to disrupt the expectations of the spectator. This disruption of the expected order, which is primarily a disruption of chronology, needs to be examined further with a closer analysis of the *mise en place*

[38] The idea of star persona is addressed in more depth in chapter four on *Insomnia*.

scene, followed by a review of other strategies used by Nolan to disrupt chronology and their overall purpose in the film.

The film has cut to a black and white interior of a motel room and we see Leonard in extreme close up, thus identifying him as the same man as in the previous scene. The camera pulls back to show him sitting on a bed wearing a shirt which significantly covers up the tattoos that we will later be as amazed as Leonard to see. At a subconscious level we accept this scene as a flashback, partly through the convention of using black and white film to depict flashbacks[39] If it is agreed that the motel sequences in the film are flashbacks, from both the opening sequence and the colour sequences that follow, and are therefore signposting the present tense colour sequence narrative of the film, then these sequences can be seen as expositional in nature, since the spectator has already seen that Leonard kills but not the background to why he kills. They are informing the spectator of the background to Leonard's condition analogically through the story of Sammy Jankis and are thus quite traditional in terms of their narrative function. These scenes are therefore similar in function to the flashbacks that inform the spectator of how Walter Neff came to be dictating his dying confession in Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity*, even if in *Double Indemnity* the flashback makes up main narrative of the film.

However, David Bordwell has suggested in *Narration in Fiction Film* that:

> A filmmaker who presents story events out of chronological order thus risks forcing the spectator to choose between reconstructing story order and losing track of current action. This is why most films avoid temporal reshufflings.
>
> (Bordwell, 33)

While the above may not be true for film noir (cf. *Laura*, *Out of The Past*), it would appear that Nolan is actively seeking to distance the audience from the narrative, since they have consistently to reconstruct and re-evaluate the events of the film. It should be born in mind that Bordwell was writing in 1985, at a time when the Internet did not exist, CDs and DVDs were unheard of and the first cumbersome video recorders were

[39] Kenneth Branagh's *Dead Again* (1991) for example uses black and white flashbacks to tell the events of thirty years prior to the main events of the film, which are filmed in colour.

making their way into the most affluent households. What he says about narrative structure should be contrasted with the Nolan's own observations:

> When I look at film history and wonder why that (narrative freedom) hasn't happened yet, well, it's a young medium, a hundred years old, and the significant reason is television coming along in the fifties. As soon as television became only the secondary way in which films were watched, films had to adhere to a pretty linear system, whereby you can drift off for ten minutes and go and answer the phone and not really lose your place…I think my generation of filmmakers is the first to have grown up with home videos, and as soon as you have VHS – we got our first when I was eleven – you can stop the film when the phone rings, and suddenly viewing films in the home becomes more like books. So, I think there is more freedom and potential for filmmakers working now to create more dense and structurally complex matters.
>
> www.film.guardian.co.uk/interview//interviewpages
>
> 27/08/02

While Nolan is prescient in certain of his comments, some could go even further. For example, it might even be argued that the cinema is no longer necessarily the primary medium for watching films, as suggested by Jon Lewis in his introduction to *The End of Cinema as We Know It*:

> There are plenty of indications that "going to the movies" may be on its way out. A vast array of sophisticated home box office delivery systems and exhibition software and hardware became available in the nineties.
>
> (Lewis, 3)

However, other aspects of Nolan's comments deserve to be taken with a pinch of salt for their degree of generalisation and perhaps even inaccuracy. Firstly, the narrative structure of Classic Hollywood production had been established long before television came along in the fifties. Bordwell in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* supports this:

> …Between 1917 and 1960 a distinct and homogeneous style has dominated American studio filmmaking – a style whose principles remain quite constant across decades, genres, studios and personnel.
>
> (Bordwell, 3)

While unable to show films on the same scale as the cinema, television was, nevertheless, only a continuation of the way in which films were watched, although if the viewer was lucky enough to be able to answer the phone when an advert break came up, then there need not be any interruption in the narrative flow. Furthermore, the narrative structure of the original version of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, with its extended confessional flashback, and of *Citizen Kane* (1941), with its multiperspective flashbacks, indicate that even the Hollywood product could deviate from the strict chronological cause and effect narrative implied by both Bordwell and Nolan as being standard within Hollywood.

However, where Nolan is really prescient in his comments is in his suggestion that the video has changed the ways in which films are consumed. This implies, as Lewis is aware, all the other media through which films can now be experienced. This is something that Hollywood has naturally taken advantage of in its rental and sales of videos and DVDs. Yet it is not just the stop button that has enabled a filmmaker to be able to create "more dense and structurally complex" narratives. It is also the rewind, fast forward, pause and slow motion buttons that have led to this. The last of these has allowed the filmmaker to introduce quasi-subliminal shots[40] into the films, which the spectator cannot be sure of having seen or even having noticed in the cinematic experience, thus ensuring a careful frame by frame viewing in the home environment when the film is finally released on Video or DVD. The rewind and fast forward buttons have also allowed the viewer to re-view some scenes and skip others altogether. Filmmakers have also exploited this type of viewing. Quentin Tarantino's *Jackie Brown* has clearly been made for the video age with its multiple perspectives of the same repeated scene suggesting recourse to the rewind button of the video.

Nolan exploits both these aspects of modern methods of film watching in *Memento*. Firstly, the introduction of subliminal material in *Memento* allows Nolan to make a salient comment on the psychological condition of Leonard. There is a black and white scene in which the resolution of the Sammy Jankis story is given. We see Sammy in a lunatic asylum and the camera zooms in slowly into a close up. A figure walks in front

[40] Examples of the quasi-subliminal shot would include the insertions of the phallus at the end of *Fight Club* and Nolan's own use of them both in *Memento* with, for example, the tattoo "I've done it" seen briefly on his chest near the end of the film and *Insomnia* where Dormer's partner appears momentarily in Dormer's hotel room after he has been killed, like some form of Banquo's ghost.

of camera and the film then apparently cuts back to Sammy. However, what the spectator sees or rather does not see in this cut-back is a three-tenths of a second shot[41] of Leonard sitting where Sammy was. This insertion can only be verified through using the slow motion on the video and naturally has implication in terms of Leonard's condition. This image is corroborated by the official website for *Memento*, www.otnemem.com, where we are told that Leonard has in fact escaped from a lunatic asylum. This in itself suggests that the modern filmmaker can create a filmic world that is no longer confined to the screen. The website for *Memento* offers important background information to Leonard's condition which would have affected the spectator's relationship with Leonard if it had been introduced in the film. While cinema purists may argue that the world created within the running time of any given film should be self-contained, this tendency to add to the filmic world created through, for example, the use of DVD extras and the Internet is actually a reflection of the fragmented multi-medial way in which we experience life and receive information.

The increased use of media other than cinema through which to experience and interpret film is something that modern filmmakers are certainly aware of and either reject or embrace. David Lynch refuses to use chapters for his DVD releases meaning that the film has to be watched in one sitting and in this way replicates the cinematic experience, at least as far as duration is concerned. David Fincher, on the other hand, is keen to be involved in all aspects of the transfer of the film to DVD. Christopher Nolan himself is also aware of the importance of the DVD release and the ways in which film is watched nowadays:

> Interviewer: Is the DVD for the film you're working on now in the back of your mind or will you wait until it's wrapped?
>
> Nolan: It's a bit of both because being a filmmaker of the home video generation, I'm always thinking that someone is going to watch the film more than once. I find I'm watching films that I don't even like two or three times because you see it in the theatre then you catch it on TV or on an airplane or on a pay-per-view in a hotel and so there's a demand for films that give you a different experience in subsequent viewings.
>
> www.dvd.reviews.net/features/story

[41] Source: James Mottram's "The Making of *Memento*" p. 70.

I should add that Nolan is being asked about *Batman: Intimidation*, a film that at the time of writing is still in pre-production. That Nolan is already thinking about how his film will be presented in other media suggests that modern filmmakers have to consider the alternative media when they are making a film and generate images and narratives that can withstand more than one viewing. This in turn suggests that the film viewing experience is developing beyond the boundaries of the first run theatre and is building up layers of interpretation through the different media by which it can be experienced.

It would be interesting to see how Bordwell would revise his theories of film narrative to include these technological revolutions, bearing in mind the above points but also the fact that the Internet acts as a form of hypertext both anticipating and developing extra levels of narrative comprehension. The success of *The Blair Witch Project* (1998) supports this contention, with much of its success being generated through the word of mouth of the Internet; while the proliferation of sites dedicated to *Pulp Fiction* suggests that much of people's understanding of any given film is created through cyber-dialogue. However, a lot of the content of such sites is of an uninformed anecdotal nature, and where message boards seem to encourage small-minded vendettas and quibbling. While the Internet is a medium that filmmakers can use to add extra levels to a film, it is also one that attracts many comments of little interest. Or as Dana Polan puts it in *B.F.I. Modern Classics: Pulp Fiction*:

> It is easy to imagine that many of the Tarantino fans are themselves people who passionately trade rich, multivaried life experiences for overbearing obsessive immersion in the cool Tarantino universe and its reinvention on the web.
>
> (Polan, 16)

As if to replicate the experience of rewinding a film to repeat a viewing of a scene, Nolan also repeats material to suggest that the momentary fragments of memory that Leonard seems to experience are like some acid flashback. The repeated shots of the bathroom where the attack on him and his wife place serve an expositional and dramatic function. When first introduced they allow the spectator to formulate the hypothesis that the wife died in the attack, suggesting Leonard's killings are justifiable, in the it must be said somewhat amoral world of filmic murder, motivated by revenge and thus ensuring spectator/protagonist sympathy for Leonard. As the scenes are

repeated and extended, this hypothesis is rejected on the realisation that the wife survived the attack, thus forcing the spectator to question the adequacy of their own earlier hypothesis and the truth of Leonard's condition.

This repeated material could also be said to have a philosophical interpretation. Walter Benjamin, writing in his essay "Theses on the Philosophy of History", points out:

> The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again. For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.
>
> (Benjamin, 3)

In the case of *Memento*, this would be to suggest that these flashes from Leonard's past of his wife lying on the bathroom floor are very much a concern of his present, even if he would like this particular aspect of his past to disappear irretrievably.

Nolan further uses repeated material as a linking device between colour sequences, with the end of a colour sequence being repeated at the opening of the following colour sequence. This is done probably to anchor the narrative continuity between the two scenes for the spectator, but also serves to act as an analogy of Leonard's memory since he is unsure whether or not a particular event has happened before, thus giving both Leonard and the spectator a sense of *déjà vu* of an event that has yet to happen.

## Narrative Source and Purpose

Christopher Nolan's *Memento* was based on a short story written by his brother Jonah Nolan. This is the first point to be noticed about the source material for the film: Nolan has gone to one of the classic source materials of Hollywood, the short story, to make his feature film. Kristin Thompson writing in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* supports this notion of the short story's importance in Hollywood:

> One of the main causes in the shift from primitive to classical cinema involves a change in the influences from other arts, from an initial close imitation of vaudeville, to a greater dependence on short fiction, novel and legitimate drama.
>
> (Thompson, 161)

Nolan could have taken a short story as his source material for a number of reasons. The first is that it is a good story, but more importantly the short story format gives a very strong sense of unity due to the limited number of characters and a strong sense of unity in action, time and setting, thus making it easier for the spectator to identify (with) the central protagonist and the events that surround him. Given the apparently confusing nature of the narrative structure in *Memento* on first viewing, the spectator needs a point of identification within the events of the film. Since the events of the film are told exclusively from Leonard's perspective, (he is in every scene and is either in shot or the camera is showing events from his point of view), the spectator is given the necessary point of identification. This allows the film to distort notions of time and memory.

It has already been suggested that the black and white sequences in the film act as expositional material, filling in the background to Leonard's condition for the benefit of the spectator. However, where they confuse is not in what is contained in their chronological ordering of events, but in their relation to the colour sequences, which instead of being ordered as cause and effect, are ordered as effect and cause. In relation to the colour sequences the spectator first sees the event and then, in a later scene, the cause of that event. This can be noted for example in the scene where Leonard finds a beaten and bloodied Dodd in a wardrobe and says "Who did this to you?" Dodd replies "You did." Naturally, neither Leonard nor the spectator has any recollection of the event. This reversal of standard narrative practice undermines the spectator's position in relation to the narrative since the more formal narrative practice of a cause being given and its effect on character then shown has been reversed. By showing the spectator an event of which the spectator has no knowledge and therefore memory as to what caused it, because none has been given, it further allows the spectator to identify with Leonard and understand his condition, since he too has only the event and no memory of the cause of the event. Leonard is thus our unreliable guide through the film.

Furthermore, Leonard's voiceover is frequently in the second person singular, which acts to distance not only Leonard from himself but further to distance the spectator from Leonard. The spectator cannot become the first person singular "I" of the film since Leonard consistently refers to himself as "you." Through such strategies the

spectator is caught in the dichotomy of identification/alienation with and from the protagonist, distanced from the narrative and forced, almost through a conditioned response, to create patterns of meaning that fulfil the narrative models of Classical Hollywood. In such a way Nolan is not only forcing the spectator to question the process of memory but also forcing the spectator to create a narrative structure that complies with generic expectations and Classical narrative structure, while simultaneously undermining the very structure created.

It is only late on in the film that the spectator is irrevocably alienated from Leonard and realises that he is an unreliable narrator and that his motives have to be questioned. This is revealed not through what he says but what he does. The scene involves Natalie goading Leonard into hitting her. This reveals that she is a manipulator with her own agenda but more importantly shows that Leonard has transgressed one of the taboos of intersocial relationships and has hit out at a woman. While it may be perfectly acceptable for the protagonist to kill within the parameters of any given genre, it is never acceptable for the figure identified as the hero of a film to hit a woman. Nolan thus makes use of one of the few "remaining" taboos in the hard-boiled genres. This transgression of both filmic and social norms is a clear indication to the spectator that Leonard is not a protagonist to be trusted.

Within the story of *Memento* there is also the story that Leonard is constructing. It is indicated through the upside-down tattoo on his chest which states "Photograph: house, car, friend, foe." This suggests that Leonard is fully aware that he is living in his own (rather conventional) revenge narrative and that each of the killings he commits follows the same pattern, while each of the four elements tattooed on his chest is transferable to a new scenario. For the murder of Jimmy room 21 was home, a pick-up truck his car, Teddy his friend and Jimmy his foe. For the murder of Teddy room 304 home, the Jaguar has replaced the pick-up truck and Teddy has become the foe with Natalie becoming the friend. This strictly ordered cause and effect narrative that enables Leonard to live his life implies that he is fully aware of the artifice of his condition and uses the revenge structure to give his life meaning. With this three-handed dramatic structure of protagonist, friend, foe, Leonard has become the leading player in his own film, with his tattoos, Polaroids and police report his screenplay full of lines he can never remember. Since his memory can only function in 10-minute loops, he has been

cast off from his past, cannot develop meaningful relationships in the present and has nothing to look forward to, with the motel room being the perfect location for this permanent state of transience. That he is paying for two motel rooms at the Discount Inn and adopts different clothing for each of the rooms suggest a fracturing multiple personality disorder.

It should also be remembered that Leonard's construction of an artificial world is working within the confines of the narrative construction of an artificial world, with all aspects of that world carefully considered. A look at *The Complete Film Production Handbook* reveals that:

> Since it is difficult to clear references to identifiable phone numbers, most films use phone numbers that begin with the prefix 555, a prefix that has not appeared in any area code except for directory information.
>
> (Honthaner, 208)

With this knowledge in mind we can see that Teddy's phone number in the film, 555 0134, while obeying the conventions of modern film production, is another level of filmic artifice; an artifice which is increased when we realise that this same phone number is Marla Singer's phone number in *Fight Club*[42]. This gives the rather odd image of crossed lines and Leonard ending up in somebody else's film, a film that also deals with the male in crisis.

**Generic Expectations**

Nolan has used the tropes of the film noir to further aid spectator identification. By using the omnipresent narrator, a supposedly investigative plot, an apparent *femme fatale* etc, Nolan is expecting the audience to pick up on the generic nature of the film. He does this, I suggest, partly to ensure spectator identification with the type of film being watched but also so that Nolan can foreground narrative technique so as to undermine spectatorial expectations. He is relying on the spectator being familiar with the conventions of both Classic Hollywood narrative and the generic conventions of

[42] Source: Internet Movie Database

film noir so that this very familiarity with the conventions can be questioned. Rick Altman addresses this issue:

> However much genre texts may recollect events, locations or relationships, they must also recall previous texts or they will fail to assure the genre's continued existence. In order to play the role of genre spectator properly (i.e., in such a way to engage individual text as part of a genre), each spectator must have a double experience: experience of the culture and its assumptions, rules and myths, as well as the experience of other genre texts.
>
> (Altman, 189)

*Memento* has been much identified as a film noir[43]. This enables the studio when publicising a film to distil the events of the narrative into genre expectations and thus attract an audience who would be interested in a film noir as opposed to a musical, for example. The studio is relying on the audience being familiar with other types of film noir so that the current work can be approached with a degree of generic certainty. Thus the spectator can make presuppositions as to the type of event they will see in the film and then compare the events of the present film with their pre-construct of what a film noir is. In such a context, the generic label of film noir, musical, horror is above all a marketing tool[44], enabling a studio to promote a film and an audience to preconceive its content. Altman says as much:

> Producers' interest in enlarging audiences drives them to offer sharable unspecifics as an acceptable meeting point for larger and larger groups of viewers. When trying to bring together spectators who actually share less and less, what better meeting place than the common past provided by the genre itself?
>
> (Altman, 190)

Since the generic product of Hollywood is relying on the collective memory of the audience to reference previous texts and postulate content and compare and contrast it with previous texts, this actually puts even the most banal of modern studio filmmaking within the reach of the postmodern:

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[43]Rita Kempley, writing in *The Washington Post*, describes *Memento* as "a time scrambling film noir." George Perry, writing for the BBC says that "Film noir has never been so labyrinthine" while Peter Rainer of the *New York Magazine*, says that Leonard is " a film noir adventurer."

[44] *Memento* is described generically by www.allmovie.com as being a thriller, mystery, crime thriller and post-noir.

> Memory, the archival site of the past, and intertextuality work together to reproduce a collective recollection of the past into the present. A memory game calls into question the attention/participation of the spectator. For this reason, postmodern cinema is made of and from the accumulation of information that, through memory and quotations, presents a rereading and rewriting of things so that the act of communication tends to supersede the content of communication.
>
> (Degli-Esposti, 5)

It could be a criticism of Nolan that his formalist concerns mean that what spectators remember most about *Memento* is its structure, in other words the way in which the film is communicated and not what is communicated. Nolan uses the spectator's memory of the structure and content of prior generic films and the plot device of Leonard's lack of memory, so as to attempt a rereading of the generic content of film noir and a rewriting of how classic narrative can be approached. If we accept that this is stylistic game playing then *Memento* can be seen as a "postmodern" film. The reliance of any given "postmodern" film on generic tropes and stereotypes has been criticised by, among others, Fredric Jameson (as quoted in Hill) with particular reference to *Chinatown* and *Body Heat*:

> He argues (Jameson) that as a result of their use of pastiche and "intertextual" reference, such films may seem to exemplify a characteristically postmodern lack of historical depth. Such films, he claims, are unable to re-create a "real" past but only a simulation of the past based upon pre-existing representations and styles.
>
> (Hill, 101)

While Nolan has made no reference to postmodernism in any interview, this attitude seems to mirror the approach of Leonard himself. He too has no historical depth, living as he does in a never-ending memoryless present and cannot create a "real" past but only a simulation of it through his photographs, tattoos and doctored police file. This paradox is at the very heart of the film: while it cannot be denied that the film is accidentally postmodern in its approach due to its use of a fractured narrative and its references to prior texts, its central character can be considered as a possible critique of the postmodern style, since Leonard is the very embodiment of shallowness in terms of motivation and the way in which he structures his life.

## The Fact of Memory

Leonard is a great believer in facts. He tattoos those facts he considers to be incontrovertible on his body thus making them appear to be indelible memories. He does this because he believes memory *per se* to be unreliable:

> No, Really. Memory's not perfect. It's not even that good. Ask the police; eyewitness testimony is unreliable. The cops don't catch a killer by sitting around remembering stuff. They collect facts, make notes, draw conclusions. Facts, not memories: that's how you investigate. I know, it's what I used to do. Memory can change the shape of the room or the colour of a car. It's an interpretation, not a record. Memories can be changed or distorted and they're irrelevant if you have the facts.
>
> (*Memento*, screenplay, 135)

This speech is central to the theme of memory and interpretation of memory as explored in *Memento*; a view corroborated by Mottram:

> In many ways the key speech of the film, it contains the very crux of Nolan's argument and Leonard's experience.
>
> (Mottram, 47)

Memories can be changed since they are founded on an **interpretation** of real events. In the film's real time, rather than chronological, denouement, it is suggested that Leonard has indeed been interpreting his facts for his own purpose. Yet this willingness to interpret facts to suit his purpose is nothing unusual. Paul Auster writes the following in *The Invention of Solitude*:

> Like everyone else, he craves a meaning. Like everyone else, his life is so fragmented that each time he sees a connection between two fragments he is tempted to look for a meaning in that connection. The connection exists. But to give it meaning, to look beyond the bare fact of its existence, would be to build an imaginary world inside the real world, and he knows it would not stand.
>
> (Auster, 147)

Both Leonard's speech and the above quotation identify the importance of facts. Leonard looks upon them as the foundation of his philosophy, his *raison d'être*. Without the facts his world would crumble. Auster considers a fact to be a fragment and is attempting to avoid a causal connection between any two facts. However, Leonard's approach is also one that the spectator inevitably experiences. The spectator seeks strong causal connections between the events, or facts, taking place on the screen. Just as the tradition of generic and narrative filmmaking demands strong unity of time, place and action, so the audience seeks to create unity for the facts, or plot events, of any given film. In this way, watching a film is also an investigation, collecting evidence, testing theories and drawing conclusions. The structure of *Memento* deliberately allows us to draw the wrong conclusions thus undermining both our suppositions and makes us question the veracity of the facts of the movie by making us question our memory of what we have seen in the film.

Leonard, however, goes further in his collection of facts. He seeks to mythologize his past and his supposedly happy relationship. Yet there are enough clues, or facts, in the film to suggest that the relationship with his wife was not that happy. We see the irritation he experiences when anyone calls him "Lenny"[45]. Why? Because his wife called him "Lenny" and he hated it[46]. In one of the (un)reliable flashbacks we see Leonard and his wife together in bed, and he questions her as to why she is reading the same book yet again. She snaps at him not to be such a prick. This is hardly the language of perfect love. Lastly, there is the backward handwritten tattoo stating that "John G raped and murdered my wife", which Leonard might have scrawled across his chest in the moments after he has (un)knowingly killed his wife. Why would Leonard seek to mythologize his past? According to Elsaesser and Buckland:

> Lévi-Strauss assumed that a society starts telling itself myths when, as a culture, it is faced with contradictory experiences which it cannot make conscious to itself.
>
> (Elsaesser & Buckland, 32-3)

Leonard therefore seems to have built up the myth of his happy relationship with his wife as a way of dealing with the contradictions within the relationship and as a way of

[45] See footnote page 69.
[46] Christopher Nolan always refers to Leonard as "Leonard." This in itself is revealing, suggesting as it does that Leonard's wife's insistence on calling him "Lenny" was indeed an attempt to goad him.

dealing with the guilt of killing her. He cannot bear to make conscious the facts of the relationship. Yet these facts are overtly expressed in the film in the flashes we have of Leonard and Catherine together. The flashback here acts as a construct of the subconscious being expressed in the conscious experience. The experiences of Leonard should therefore make us question how we review the facts, seek justification and mythologize experience as a way of dealing with contradiction. Memory, both at an individual and collective level, is certainly fallible, but deliberately so. It is a way for us to deal with the inherent contradictions of existence and experience. Within memory myth is created.

## Leonard and Society

Given the curious fact that Leonard has no short term memory, yet supposedly has perfect recall of all the events of his life leading up to the moment he was attacked, it is surprising how little of his life we know from before the attack. We see the Sammy Jankis story told in flashback within the black and white sequence and we have flashes of life with his wife. Since he is after revenge for his wife's murder, it is surprising that he spends so little time actually remembering her. When questioned by Natalie, Leonard's memory presents the spectator with a few bleached jumpy images that are more reminiscent of faded home movies than a clear picture of what his life was like. It has already been suggested that Leonard chooses not to remember his wife for very specific reasons. Yet this figure of the Man with no memory, a man who has reached the end of conventional living, corresponds to a postmodern interest in breaking away from previously held metanarratives:

> Endist thinking fits very neatly with the cultural movement known as postmodernism, which actively encourages us to free ourselves from traditional authority and the hold that the past can exert on our thought and behaviour.
>
> (Sim, 14)

Leonard is also seeking an end believing that the act of vengeance will allow him to remember to forget his wife, to paraphrase his film. Yet Leonard is wrapped up in an Old Testament, American Bible Belt metalanguage. It is one which Nolan is keen to point out is misinformed and in conflict with Teddy's opportunist capitalist

metanarrative. The collision between the two leaves the spectator squeezed in the middle, seeking a truthful metanarrative, which does not exist at a filmic level and, by implication, in society as a whole, thus fixing the film firmly in the postmodern distrust of metanarrative as explanation.

Leonard as a character is locked in a present with seemingly very little recollection of any event. He has certainly broken away from traditional authority. He can kill at will and without retribution in a world where the police and justice system barely exist. The only retribution for the death of Natalie's boyfriend at the hand of Leonard is that he is offered a glass of beer that has been spat in. He has none of the trappings that capitalist society dictates as being normal and desirable: he has no job, no house and any car he needs he steals. He has escaped his past in so far as he is no longer the married man with a steady job and a steady life. He is a man in permanent transition as suggested by the motel rooms. In Leonard's case the motel room is also a space where memory can be externalised through the map he puts on the wall with his photos stuck to it. It is not by accident that the Sammy Jankis story is told in the black and white sequence of the film within the confines of a motel room since both the motel room and the Sammy Jankis story are constructs of Leonard's mind. He is outside of the bounds of society, locked in the present and without an accurate history:

> Jameson defines postmodern culture in terms of "depthlessness" representative of "a new culture of the image or the simulacrum"; a new kind of spatialized temporality and consequent weakening of "historicity."
>
> (Hill, 101)

While Jameson is criticising the notions and ideas of postmodernism, he is almost perfectly describing Leonard. Leonard is an extremely shallow man, obsessed with one idea and incapable of talking about anything else, living within a new form of time: the present with no memory and no history apart form the false shadows of memory:

> Try to imagine what everyday would be like in a society in which no one knew any history. Imagination boggles, because it is only through knowledge of history that society can have knowledge of itself. As man without memory and self-knowledge is a man adrift, so a society without memory (or more correctly without recollection) and self-knowledge would be a society adrift.

(Marwick, 13)

If the above analogy is reversed, Leonard can be taken as representative of modern society, a society in which:

> Computer graphics, the multimedial hypertextuality of the CD-ROM, computer memory, and imaging are now able to exceed human memory.
>
> (Degli-Esposti, 5)

With artificial memory now being far more efficient than human memory and our increasing dependence on technological resources, Leonard thus becomes an Everyman symbolising our dependence on and our mistrust of technology and *Memento* is:

> A postmodern fable filmed in the information age, *Memento*'s hero is a renegade gumshoe, an amateur private eye strangely (yet aptly) dependent on handwritten notes and fading Polaroids – the latter flashed like a detective's badge; both a symbol of his quest and an assured definition of self. The distinct lack of electronic paraphernalia – bugs, camcorders, tape-players, computers, cell-phones – indicates just how out of step Leonard is.
>
> (Mottram, 41)

Paradoxically, while Leonard can be interpreted a symbol of the postmodern condition, he is also a return to the primitiveness of our forbearers, with his tattoos suggesting the ritualistic forms of decoration of some long lost tribe. He trusts his body but distrusts all technology as evidenced in the "never answer the phone" tattoo. His use of the Polaroid camera is merely as an aid to visual memory, a literal photographic memory, if you will. His tattooing furthermore reflects a contemporary interest in tattooing and body piercing, as if individuality can only be expressed through a return to primitive practices in an age when conventionality is actively promoted through chainstores and mass produced brands. Yet his primitiveness goes further than the recourse to tattooing. He is primitive precisely because he kills with no morals, no conscience and most importantly no memory of the event.

However, this shifting signifier known as Leonard is also, figuratively speaking, a symbol of the very Western Liberal Democracy that he could be said to be a critique of. During the murder of Jimmy he personifies the very symbols of the blue collar,

working class of American society; he drives a pick-up truck and wears a plaid shirt and jeans. Yet, just before Jimmy is murdered, Leonard asks him to strip out of his expensive-looking suit and then steal his Jaguar. These are obviously symbols of the successful capitalist.

Furthermore, it is precisely these clothes[47] we see Leonard in at the beginning of the film as he murders Teddy. Part of the process of identification with the protagonist involves identification with their clothing. Since the standard Hollywood film normally seeks to establish audience identification with the heroic protagonist, we assume that Leonard and the clothes he is wearing are positive symbols: a successful young American with a justifiable reason, in filmic terms, for killing Teddy. However, in the film's denouement we see that Leonard has manipulated the evidence to literally "suit" his purpose, thus exposing both his clothing and the position in society it represents as fraudulent.

As can be seen, to fix Leonard to any one motive or reason for living and therefore, by implication, any particular philosophy or metanarrative is impossible. The spectator is left with questions even though the film has very neatly attempted to close the narrative within the framework of its 113 minutes. This brings to mind the words of Terry Eagleton:

> The rejection of the so-called metanarratives is definitive of postmodern philosophy, but the options it poses here are sometimes rather narrow. Either you are enthused by a particular metanarrative, such as the story of technological progress or the march of the Mind, or you find these fables oppressive and instead turn to a plurality of tales.
>
> (Eagleton, 341)

The spectator may attempt to come up with a grand theory to explain the events of the film and each theory will be different from any other theory. This brings to mind the "meta" referred to Eagleton's quote. But what is of importance in this quote in relation to *Memento* are the words "story", "fables" and "tales". While Eagleton might be suggesting that much of philosophy is indeed storytelling and therefore fiction, it is

[47] Nolan may well be questioning the spectator's memory with these clothes and indeed indulging in a degree of hypertextuality, as the suit and shirt are identical to the ones worn by Gabriel Byrne in *The Usual Suspects*, another 3rd cycle noir that undermines an audience's narrative expectations.

interesting to consider that within the fictional world of *Memento* much of the interest in the film revolves around trying to find the truth, which of course at a fictional level cannot exist, either for the spectator or Leonard. The film shows that much of his understanding of the world is indeed based on fiction, on mythologizing and constructing narratives to give himself a purpose. Our struggle to understand Leonard and construct a meaningful narrative can therefore be seen as analogous to our attempts to understand ourselves and a depiction of the fictions we create in daily life.

The fictions that Leonard creates could possibly make him the bleakest of protagonists portrayed in the generic world of film noir. As Dale E. Ewing Jr. suggests in his essay "Film Noir: Style and Content":

> If we follow the style and content approach, the "story" will tell us what he does. If the hero is able to reconcile these negative terms – learn something positive from his alienation and despair – then we are not dealing with a black film. If the hero suffers continually and never learns anything then we are looking at a genuine film noir.
>
> (Ewing, Jr., 82)

Leonard is, if nothing else, a protagonist who never learns and one who suffers continually. What Nolan has done with Leonard's suffering and his inability to learn within the framework of the fractured narrative is to suggest that the (post)modern condition is not that far removed from Leonard's state of being. While we may all learn from our mistakes to a greater or lesser degree, we are all dependent on the fictions we create to justify choices and exclusions and should therefore question how far these fractured narratives prevent us from learning and how far we are all living the life of the protagonist in a postmodern film noir.

However, as is the case with *Following* and, to a lesser extent, *Insomnia*, *Memento*'s characters inhabit a world that is devoid of warmth. While it could be argued that Natalie grows closer to Leonard, the very fact that any advances can never be reciprocated because they cannot be remembered counteracts any warmth. The characters interact with each other for their own, selfish, purposes. This coldness at the heart of all three films supports Nolan's exploration of the existential angst yet this repetition of character traits suggests that Nolan is a filmmaker who is not interested in

or cannot believe in the importance of human contact. While it might be too strong to call him an anti-humanist, it can certainly be said that he is a filmmaker who is more interested in the analytical process of narrative and character interaction as a means to a narrative end rather than character interaction and development. His most humane film is certainly *Insomnia* and this is largely a result of what Al Pacino and Robin Williams bring to the film. It is this very aspect of star persona and audience expectation that will be examined next in relation to *Insomnia*.

# CHAPTER FOUR – AMERICAN STUDIO NOLAN

## STARS AND SPACE IN *INSOMNIA*

### Synopsis

*Insomnia* involves an already tired Los Angeles detective Will Dormer (Al Pacino) arriving in Nightmute, Alaska, with his younger partner Hap Eckhart (Martin Donovan) to investigate the death of local teenager, Kay Connell (Crystal Lowe). His arrival in the town means he has escaped for the while the Internal Affairs investigation which threatens to ruin his career. However, his relief is short-lived as his partner admits he is going to do a deal with Internal Affairs on their return. As they set a trap to capture the presumed killer, Walter Finch (Robin Williams), Dormer accidentally (?) shoots and kills his partner; witnessed by Finch. His ever-growing insomnia caused both by his sense of guilt and the never-ending daylight of the Alaskan summer affects his judgement, leads him to manipulate evidence and he is tempted into striking a deal with Finch to frame local teenager, Randy Stetz (Jonathon Jackson). Dormer has already set local, young, idealistic policewoman Ellie Burr (Hilary Swank) to investigate his partner's death, perhaps believing that with her inexperience she is incapable of uncovering the truth, but her persistence means that both she and Dormer are drawn into a deadly battle with Finch. Dormer ends the film having killed the real killer. Shot, perhaps dying, in desperate need of sleep he encourages Ellie Burr not to tamper with the evidence that will ruin his career and compromise hers.

### Financial Background

*Insomnia*, the 2002 remake of the 1997 Norwegian original of the same name, sees Christopher Nolan working on his first reasonably big budget film. According to the website www.romanticmovies.about.com/cs/boxoffice the production budget for this film was USD 46,000,000 with a further USD 20,000,000 made available for advertising and promotion. This is a far cry from the USD 4,500,000 that *Memento* cost to make and an even further cry from the USD 6,000 needed to make *Following.* To date, the film has grossed USD 67,263,182 in the American market. There are no figures available for returns worldwide. However, the aforementioned website also suggests:

> Budget numbers for movies can be both difficult to find and unreliable. Studios often try to keep the information secret and will use accounting tricks to inflate or reduce announced budgets.
>
> www.romanticmovies.about.com/cs/boxoffice

Just as Dormer manipulates evidence to evade detection, so studios will massage statistics to suit their purposes. While this may be true, what the figures do suggest is that in absolute terms *Insomnia* is less successful as far as returns on investment are concerned than *Memento*, which, according to the same website, has grossed USD 25,530,884 in the American market and a further USD 39,641,967 worldwide.

The contrasting cases of *Waterworld* (1995) and *Titanic* (1997) show that higher investment does not necessarily guarantee larger profits at the box office. Even though *Insomnia* has grossed more in actual terms than *Memento* in the American market, the percentage profit is far less. Hollywood's obsession with figures indicates the bottom line: Hollywood is a business not an art house. It launches products in an attempt to create brand definition, just as, for example, Nike does when launching a new trainer. In the case of Hollywood, what is created is a "must see" ethos as opposed to the "must have" ethos that drives the consumerist marketing of Nike. Both these forms of consumerism are examples of the brand-driven consumerist global market. In his essay "Is Hollywood America?" Frederick Wasser shows the importance of the global market to Hollywood:

> Sam Kitt, a current Universal executive, confirms that all the major studios consider the global audience, before launching a more expensive than average movie ($ 27 million or more in negative costs).
>
> (Wasser, 356)

In short, Hollywood films have become franchise. To maximise profits, films have to be seen in the worldwide market, in a variety of formats with as many marketing spin offs as possible. This makes the studios anonymous corporations that films such as *Fight Club* seek to criticise, even though such a film has been made in the very marketplace it is attempting to criticise. Hollywood can allow such criticism since it is more interested in profit margins than content and would probably be more interested

that the film has recouped its USD 65,000,000 budget than any criticisms it offers of capitalism.

Nolan is himself becoming a brand, increasingly recognisable as a director who creates intelligent noir movies that do not lose money. Hollywood will promote him as a brand, but only for as long as he is successful. He might have dreamed of seeing "A Christopher Nolan Film" as the opening credits roll but is he prepared to be reduced to a type of brand and thus restricted in the type of film he can make in the high stakes game of Hollywood? The answer would appear to be "Yes". In the space of four years his trajectory has taken him from making ultra-low budget films in England to making big budget movies in Hollywood, which would suggest that Nolan has always been an ambitious, **commercial** filmmaker and one who is prepared to sacrifice principle for a bigger budget and a potentially wider audience.

What the producers and Nolan have for their financial and artistic investment is a film with a far wider canvas in terms of location shooting and set-piece action than either *Memento* or *Following*, and the services of two mainstream Hollywood stars in Al Pacino and Robin Williams. Each of these stars comes to the film with a certain reputation, which the film exploits by using the star persona of Pacino to establish a certain moral ambiguity in the spectator and, in the case of Williams, casting him against type so as to undermine audience expectations. This in turn allows Nolan to continue his exploration of the theme of a crisis of (male) identity introduced in *Following* and developed in *Memento*. The perceived crisis in male identity and how it is expressed in *Insomnia* will be examined later in this chapter. However, before this can be discussed it needs placing within a framework of the generic conventions of detective movies. Furthermore, since the traditional notion of the star is as often as not predicated on appearance within generic representations, this notion also needs to be examined, both from a traditional and postmodern perspective. Finally, the question of how time and space are perceived and reflected in *Insomnia* will be addressed.

## Establishing Generic Expectations

Consider the matter of opening scenes in films:

> Consider the matter of opening sentences in novels: logical presuppositions have an important role here, as the basic figures which determine a hermeneutic strategy. *The boy stood by the strange object pretending that nothing had happened* implies a very rich set of prior sentences and as an opening sentence in a novel or story would, by the very weight of its presuppositions, put us *in medias res* and program our reading as an attempt to discover the elements of this "prior" text: what boy? What object? What had happened? But logically the opening sentence with the fewest presuppositions would be something like *Once upon a time there lived a king who had a daughter*. Poor in logical presuppositions, this sentence is extremely rich in literary and pragmatic presuppositions. It relates the story to a series of other stories, identifies it with conventions of genre, and asks us to take certain attitudes towards it.
>
> (Culler, 29,30)

Logical, literary, pragmatic and, particularly, cinematic presuppositions are also brought into play in the opening sequence of any film and in particular the popular generic products released by Hollywood. It is in a mainstream film's interest to establish identification with character, setting and time as quickly as possible so that spectators can clearly discriminate good from bad and be led from the exposition into the disruption of equilibrium and the attempts to repair that disruption through to the resolution of the film. The easiest way of achieving this is to revert to generic strategies and to bring out the image or brand of the star, since these two methods ensure that spectators are, in general terms, aware of where a story is going and know how to position themselves in relation to the protagonist based upon their presuppositions of the star persona.

In generic terms, *Insomnia* establishes itself as a detective film very early on. Within the first minute of the film, before a word of dialogue is spoken, we see Dormer looking at autopsy pictures and Eckhart reading a newspaper. Who could be looking at autopsy pictures? The logical presupposition is that he is a detective and Eckhart his partner, thus fitting into the Hollywood, generic convention that they are both police detectives since they are travelling together, as opposed to private detectives whose work is largely solitary. The spectator also assumes, as a result of the autopsy pictures,

that there has been a murder and that the two detectives have been sent to solve it. The pragmatic presupposition made is that the murder will be solved by the end of the film. Furthermore, the spectator is also informed in the same scene that the two detectives come from Los Angeles, through the name of the newspaper, and that Internal Affairs are investigating them, through a newspaper headline. This also enhances the presupposition that they are police detectives rather than private detectives. A further generic presupposition is that the Internal Affairs investigation will also be resolved in a formalist sense by the end of the film. Nolan shows great skill in establishing such presuppositions within the first minute of the film and without a word of dialogue. The cause and effect chain suggested is as strong as the prediction of the last sentence in a *once upon a time* story. It is, however, ironic that the detective story, revolving as it does around the solving of mystery, in generic terms contains only a qualified mystery. Regardless of the many possible twists, the mystery will always be solved for the spectator in terms of generic conventions even if the detectives are compromised or killed before the resolution of the film.

Since there are two detectives in *Insomnia*, this leads to the presupposition of the two possible models for the relationship between the two detectives, both of which *Insomnia* examines. The first possible model suggests that the two are equals yet there are tensions in the relationship and that one of the detectives will die. The second model is that of mentor and pupil, where the experienced detective guides the younger detective. The former is the model of Dormer and Eckhart's relationship, even though it does have elements of the latter. Films as diverse as *Maltese Falcon* and *L.A. Confidential* support the former presupposition. The second model is posited in the relationship between Pacino and Swank and will be explored later. The standard mentor/pupil model can be seen in films such as *The Rookie* (1990) and *Se7en*, although being a 3rd cycle film noir this film seeks to undermine the generic conventions of this relationship.

It should not be forgotten that, within the construct of the fictional world, the murderer, Walter Finch, is a detective storywriter and is therefore fully aware of the generic conventions that such stories contain. Dormer himself draws attention to this early on, when searching through the dead girl's bag and on finding a detective story, says, "Who reads crap like this?" This comment works on two levels: Dormer is dismissive

of the genre within the narrative structure of the film, since he is a real detective within the said fictional structure. But the comment further works as a criticism of the detective genre in cinema. He could be saying, "Who *watches* crap like this?" Nolan is happy to play with generic expectations at the level of the script. Nolan has to be credited with influencing the script since he worked closely with the screenwriter, Hillary Seitz, and can therefore be credited with being responsible for what is or is not in the script[48]. Later on he has Finch say to Dormer, after Finch has set up Randy Stetz as the patsy, "I told you I'd write an ending they'd like. You're too wrapped up in the details." Here Finch, as a fictional character, is manipulating fact and fiction in a work of fiction and further drawing our attention to the artifice of generic conventions, both at a literary and filmic level. With such a comment he can also be positioned within the generic conventions of the so-called Super Villain, a quasi-controlling authorial voice, as seen in *Se7en* and the Hannibal Lector series, where the villain successfully manipulates law enforcement agencies as a demonstration of his intellectual superiority. Finch, convinced of his intellectual superiority, manipulates but without the success of the examples given.

Where the film does vary from generic conventions is, in fact, in its ending where we see Dormer exhausted and shot lying outside the boathouse saying, "Let me sleep. Just let me sleep." What is not made clear, which it would be in the strongly formalised generic detective story, is whether or not Dormer dies. Nolan offers us an albeit vaguely open ending that allows us to decide whether Dormer is referring to sleep in life or the sleep of death, thus positioning the film within the postmodern interest of re-evaluating generic narrative conventions and expectations. This is something that Robin Williams explicitly mentions on the film's official website:

> Normally there's a good cop pursuing a bad guy but the interesting twist about *Insomnia* is that the moral high ground is quickly lost and the story moves into a more ambiguous area.
>
> www.dontcloseyoureyes.warnerbros.com

These generic similarities and familiar plot devices of previous films are what can be called external prior texts that help the spectator rapidly establish a position in relation

[48] I say, "Is not" because the script has a number of significant differences in terms of character and plot development to the original version. These will be examined later. Reference should also be made to the footnote on page 63, which indicates Nolan's level of involvement in the script.

to character and plot in the film being watched. They work on a superficial level and merely serve for the audience to notice similarities between a current text and prior texts. As can be seen from the aforementioned quote the ambiguous nature of the characters in *Insomnia* means that such generic identifications as good guy/bad guy are undermined through establishing and then eroding generic norms, thus leaving the spectator with a more ambivalent response to character than in a standard generic work. This ambivalence is alluded to in the scene where Al Pacino shoots his partner. In the mist we see Pacino take aim and shoot at an undefined figure. Just like Pacino, we are unsure as to the identity of the person he has shot and are then, because of the way Dormer reacts, unsure as to whether Eckhart was shot deliberately or not. This lack of certainty is key to the film and is only resolved in the denouement. That Pacino is capable of transmitting this ambivalence is testament to his star persona and his skill as an actor.

## The Role of Al Pacino in *Insomnia*

*Insomnia* is very much a 3rd cycle noir in the way it treats its stars, with notions of good guy and bad guy blurred. This is something Nolan is explicitly aware of and mentions in the official *Insomnia* website:

> It was very clear to me that casting Al was the most interesting way of approaching this material. He's played so many great cops through the years, from *Serpico* to *Sea of Love* to *Heat*, and we were really able to use that history and that identification with his iconic cop image to play against expectation.
>
> www.dontcloseyoureyes.warnerbros.com

While Nolan is being selective in his analysis of Pacino's career to suit his argument, he is clearly aware of audience expectation and identification and is conscious that relations between the spectator and the star are established. Richard Dyer, writing in *Stars*, has developed the point at length:

> As regards the fact that a given star is in the film, audience foreknowledge, the star's name and her/his appearance (including the sound of her/his voice and dress styles associated with him/her) all already signify that condensation of attitudes and values which is the star's image.
>
> (Dyer, 126)

The opening scene therefore allows us to identify with the detective precisely because it is Al Pacino. This is not to say that because it is Al Pacino, he must be playing a detective, rather that because it is Al Pacino, he is going to be the major character in the film and it is through his eyes we will experience the story. The spectator is thus drawn into viewing the cinematic world through his star persona.

What is interesting in Nolan's perception of Pacino, however, is that he is using Pacino's history to allow the audience to establish empathy with the detective figure, even if many of the audience will not have seen the first film Nolan mentions, *Serpico* (1973), in which Pacino plays the eponymous hero who single-mindedly seeks out and exposes corruption in the New York Police. By casting Pacino as a cop covering up his own corruption in *Insomnia*, Nolan is contrasting the current role with Pacino's former cinematic self, while using his history as a fictional police officer and his star persona to delineate a character that the audience can immediately recognise and who is, as a consequence, believable in a fictional world. This is something, which Dyer has recognised:

> The phenomenon of audience/star identification may yet be the crucial aspect of the placing of the audience in relation to a character. The "truth" about a character's personality and the feelings which it evokes may be determined by what the reader takes to be the truth about the person of the star playing the part.
>
> (Dyer, 125)

The "truth" about spectator identification is far more complex than suggested by Nolan. The audience is drawing on its knowledge not just of Al Pacino as a detective but all the various roles that he has played. To a certain extent, the audience can be said to have already blocked out the lead character of a film into a fully rounded character purely because of their perceptions of the person of the star and his /her star persona.

Yet identification with the central character is not merely achieved through using a star's persona. Camera point of view is a further way of establishing spectator identification with a character. Nolan continues with his own strategy and the noir tradition of keeping the lead male protagonist in shot for virtually the entire film, (See

*The Big Sleep* and *Maltese Falcon* for examples of this). This is something the director of photography on *Insomnia*, Wally Pfister, testifies to:

> We created intimacy by keeping the camera with the main character. The camera always stays with Will Dormer, either travelling in front of him or behind him revealing his point of view. In this way, the audience explores the unfamiliar landscape with him, and they feel the light piercing through the windows as he desperately tries to sleep.
>
> www.dontcloseyoureyes.warnerbros.com

The spectator is thus drawn into viewing the cinematic world through both the star persona of Al Pacino and, equally importantly, through the camera work emphasising Will Dormer's point of view.

One of the features of stars is that they are subject to the ravages of time just like the rest of us. Any good filmmaker will naturally manipulate the physical appearance of the star to suit their purpose, emphasising certain physiognomic aspects while repressing others. Pacino as projected in *Serpico* is a young, good-looking idealist with the clothes, beard and long hair that allow us to believe him as some form of hippy saviour[49], prepared to sacrifice himself for the greater good. The first shot of Pacino in *Insomnia* is an extreme close up of his eyes, compelling us to notice the bags under the eyes and the implied tiredness of Dormer. This leads us to a metaphorical reading of Pacino's appearance. If the eyes are the windows to the soul, then these eyes have seen too much and the soul is rotten like Dorian Gray's picture. The Pacino of *Insomnia* is haggard, physically and spiritually tired and reactive rather than proactive, decayed but ultimately redeemable through his final act in the film and so in keeping with the notion of stars representing positive values.

[49] It is ironic to consider that Pacino has also played the devil in *Devil's Advocate* (1997) a film in which he is naturally the antithesis of the Jesus-like figure of *Serpico* and which addresses the excesses of ambition and the American dream. But the American dream is more concerned with redemption than decay, even though decay may be the logical outcome of the dream.

**The Role of Robin Williams in *Insomnia***

Another way of dealing with the corruption of thirty years earlier would have been to laugh at it and satirise it. While Robin Williams was not a satirist as such, his trajectory to star started as a stand up comedian in the mid-seventies and his profile increased in the TV series *Mork and Mindy* from 1978 to 1982. While he has subsequently diversified from purely comic roles his star persona can be considered as positive, warm and good-hearted, through films such as *Mrs Doubtfire* (1993) and *Good Morning Vietnam* (1987), with a maverick wit which is perceived as neither vicious nor stereotyped. He has also been recognised as a serious actor in Hollywood terms by winning the Oscar for Best Supporting Actor for *Good Will Hunting* (1997). To further confound audience expectations as to *Insomnia*'s stars, Nolan cast Williams as the killer Walter Finch because:

> We'd been looking for somebody to play opposite Al who is not only a tremendous actor, but who also has a similar kind of audience identification with his star persona.
>
> www.dontcloseyoureyes.warnerbros.com

His transformation is perhaps more disturbing than Al Pacino's in terms of audience expectation, considering the range of films Williams has acted in, from childhood icons: Popeye, the voice of the Genie in *Aladdin* (1992), and Peter Pan to worthy teacher figures in *Dead Poets Society* (1989) and *Good Will Hunting*. While Pacino has played a wide range of characters, Williams is very much the cuddly, fast-talking teddy bear in the public's collective imagination, with his humour, or rather his ability to ad-lib being implicitly perceived as the outrageousness of a prolonged childhood, unfettered by adult responsibility. This is made manifest in Francis Ford Copola's *Jack* (1996), where Williams plays a child in a man's body. Williams comes to any given film with a contrasting star persona to Pacino, a presupposition that Nolan is very much aware of and is interested in exploring in *Insomnia*.

However, Nolan goes even further in his deconstruction of star image. While both stars to varying degrees play against type, the characters they play in the film are essentially similar. This is signposted very early on at the autopsy when Dormer says, "He (Finch) crossed the line. He didn't even blink. You don't come back from that." As he is saying

this, there is a close up of him stroking the dead girl's hair as she lies on the mortuary slab. A perverse tender gesture that suggests that Dormer has already crossed a moral line that he can't come back from, implying that the similarities between himself and Finch are very strong. Furthermore, Robin Williams the star has also crossed the line from which he can't come back: his star persona has been given an extra dimension by playing the character of Finch, one which he seems to be encouraging as he was also cast against type in *One Hour Photo* and *Death to Smoochy* in 2002. This dimension is one that will feed into future audiences' expectations of the type of role Williams might play in future projects.

Robin Williams describes the meeting of himself and Al Pacino in *Insomnia* as a meeting of Mr Method versus Mr Anything, (see special features of DVD package for *Insomnia*), thus overtly drawing attention to the acting styles of the two stars. While Pacino comes from a theatrical background, having studied at The Actor's Studio under Lee Strasberg, thus reflecting the Stanislavskian method approach, which Dyer has referred to as "acting from the inside out" (p.132), Williams' approach, while not as simplistic as his throw-away remark suggests, is not grounded within such a tradition. What makes their meeting so effective in this film is that both performances are restrained. This is not surprising in Pacino, but is in Williams. Furthermore, the project needed an actor of both great range and a strong star persona to act opposite Pacino, so that the similarities between the characters can be established and so the actor playing Finch is not overwhelmed by the star persona of Pacino. As I will argue, the opposing styles of acting in Williams and Pacino actually work to help one of the themes of the film, which is an examination of similarities between the detective and the killer.

This is clearly seen in the first scene the two have together in *Insomnia* and takes place more than an hour into the film. It involves their meeting on the ferry. (See footnote page 20). Much of the scene is shot in close up, involving a tight headshot of both Pacino and Williams in frame at the same time. In this two-shot they are separated by a vertical green pole and circle the pole as if trying to work out each other's character. The pole positioned in mid-frame emphasises the legitimate distance between this detective and criminal while their circling of the pole indicates there might be a greater similarity between the two characters than at first seems. The tight framing of just their heads indicates the claustrophobic nature of the relationship in which they have found

themselves. What is admirable in both actors is the restraint they bring to the scene, their speech conspiratorially just above a whisper, their faces giving very little away. While such restraint might be expected of Pacino, it less expected of Williams and what serves the film so well, is that the spectator is tempted to believe the Williams character's earnest explanation is truthful, not just because it is well-acted, but precisely because it is Williams, the star, acting the part. This tendency to believe Williams the star over Finch the character is only shattered in the shoot out scene, when we see his proof of guilt: the murdered girl's dress and his hitting out at Ellie Burr.

Thus, through the casting of these two very different actors with very different histories, Nolan is able to play the similarities of their characters off against each other. This union of the negative aspects of character, therefore suggests, particularly in the case of Williams, a reversal of star image implying that in Nolan's noir, the spectator cannot presume that a star will be the embodiment of positive generic conventions nor will the star persona as projected in previous films necessarily uphold the traditional conservative values that such generic conventions typify.

**Hilary Swank in *Insomnia***

Like Crawford and Starling's relationship in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) the key detective relationship in *Insomnia* is between Dormer, the older experienced male detective and Burr, the younger female investigating officer. That *Insomnia* rejects the more standard male mentor/acolyte relationship, by killing off Eckhart in the first act, could be symptomatic of the tired, formulaic nature of this type of relationship in Hollywood films. A tiredness that is taken to its logical extremes in *Se7en* as Sharrett has noted:

> Two detectives, Somerset (Morgan Freeman) and Mills (Brad Pitt), represent an archetypal mainstay of the action cinema – the older man and his young acolyte, who together embody the passing down of wisdom and professionalism from one male generation to the next. In *Seven* the construct fails, and its failure is basic to the film's apocalypse. The famous denouement, with Mill's wife decapitated by John Doe, her head delivered in a cardboard box, is the film's underscoring within the male group – the pupil will not learn, and the teacher is exhausted, with nothing left to teach.
>
> (Sharrett, 321)

The pupil in *Insomnia* is certainly prepared to learn from the teacher, not only the correct procedures but also, if necessary, the ultimate tampering with evidence, a lesson her teacher ultimately prevents her from putting into practice. Burr's ingénue is prepared to learn any lesson, even those which may corrupt her, from her hero. Hero is not too strong a word here. Her first words to Dormer in the film are, "I've followed all your cases", gushed out in a burst of almost adolescent awe, as if Dormer were some sort of film star and Burr has seen all his films. This suggests that the relationship between Dormer and Burr is analogous to the spectator and star, where the relationship develops and enriches with the more films a star plays in, especially a star such as Pacino who has played a diverse number of roles. Burr at the end of the film has a far more complex relationship with Dormer than the Burr of the beginning of the film, just as the spectator has a far more complex interaction with the Pacino of now than the Pacino of thirty years ago.

But this relationship is also analogous to mentor/acolyte in terms of acting. Early on, Dormer says to Burr, "It's all about small stuff", referring to the detecting process. He could, however, be talking about the acting process and explaining as Al Pacino to actor Hilary Swank what acting is about. This is supported by Swank herself:

> I have learnt so much from him (Pacino) just in observing his approach to acting and to his role. There is a parallel between that experience and Ellie's learning curve with Will.
>
> (www.dontcloseyoureyes.warnerbros.com)

However, the casting of Swank offers the film a further level. While she may still be establishing herself as a Hollywood actor, she has already received an Oscar for Best Actress in *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), in which she played a lesbian who decides to live her life as man. Although it is most unlikely that she will be typecast as such since such roles are so rare in mainstream Hollywood, her performance in *Boys Don't Cry* does inform her role in *Insomnia* and to a degree, spectator expectation, since she is working in a male environment, is dressed in a uniform that emphasises masculinity (bomber jacket and trousers) and negates her femininity. In both films, but for different reasons, Swank's character's femininity is subsumed under dominant oppressive male culture. However, in *Insomnia*, this is something that her character is probably aware of, since it is established early on that even though she is inexperienced, she is also ambitious and,

by implication, prepared to sacrifice her femininity in a male world. Her inexperience is further enhanced in the way she is shot, frequently with a background of lush green, suggesting immaturity, in contrast to the barren landscapes, suggesting both fatigue and cynicism, against which Pacino is more frequently shot.

We have seen that the male detective partnership in the film, embodied by Dormer and Eckhart, has collapsed. The Dormer and Burr pairing at the end of the film suggest that a future is at least possible. It is important, if rather obvious, that Burr starts the film as a type of love-struck teenager and ends up having her idealised version of her hero tempered by a realism, since it not only suggests a growth of the character but also implies, that the teacher, although exhausted, perhaps dying, has been able to teach the pupil; in contrast to the relationship between Somerset and Mill's in *Se7en*. That the lesson is learnt is shown when Dormer encourages Burr not to destroy evidence, since it was precisely such an act that has led him to his present situation. Her last act in the film after Dormer has uttered his "Just let me sleep" line, is to put the shell case back into the evidence bag: regardless of whether Dormer lives or dies, she will remain true to her principles and the film ends up by delivering a paternalist moral lesson.

While the film may be suggesting that female, specifically female in this case since all the lead men are either dead or dying, idealism and ambition are to be encouraged, it does resort to stereotypical, generic convention in its denouement. Firstly, Dormer has to rescue Burr from the clutches of Finch, thus reverting to the strong male, weak female binary opposition of standard Hollywood product while also bringing the film to a standard generic climax: the shoot out. Secondly, as already mentioned, Dormer's last act is to tell Burr not to destroy the evidence. Both of these scenes comply with the audience's expectations of how male/female interactions are portrayed in the movies, but they also allow Al Pacino to be redeemed both as a character and as a star. He is after all, the biggest star in the film and has been signposted as such since the beginning. The film has allowed its biggest star to deliver a moral lesson to his protégé and the audience that is in keeping with his status. This ending needs to be compared with the ending of the original version of *Insomnia*, which will be examined next.

## Synopsis Re-viewed

Erik Skjoldbjaerg's *Insomnia* (1997) involves an Oslo detective Jonas Engstrom (Stellan Skarsgård) arriving in a small town in Northern Norway, with his older partner Erik Vik (Sverre Anker Ousdal) to investigate the death of a local teenager. As they set a trap to capture the killer, John Holt (Bjørn Floberg), Engstrom accidentally (?) shoots and kills his partner and his act is witnessed by the killer. His ever-growing insomnia caused both by his sense of guilt and the never-ending daylight of the Norwegian summer affects his judgement and leads him to manipulate evidence and be drawn into striking a deal with the killer to frame a local teenager. The experienced local policewoman Hilde Hagen (Gisken Armand) has been asked to investigate his partner's death. Engstrom deliberately manipulates evidence to ensure that his guilt remains undetected and is eventually informally, rather than formally, uncovered by Hagen as he prepares to leave the small town after the killer had slipped and drowned while being chased.

## Departures

When comparing Nolan and Skjoldbjaerg's versions of *Insomnia*, there are significant differences in how characters interact and plot functions. The basic plot elements remain the same in both films: female teenager killed, police investigate, detective shot, killer witnesses, killer attempting blackmail and the eventual death of killer and discovery of detective's killer. However, there are certain plot differences that are worth noting. Firstly, in the original version there is no Internal Affairs investigation involving the two detectives. This subplot allows Nolan to create a more strained relationship between the two detectives and give Dormer a motive for shooting Eckhart, and thus help to create doubt in both the minds of Dormer and the spectator as to whether the shooting was an accident or not. The shooting in the original is motiveless and is therefore clearly interpreted as an accident, which Engstrom we feel might attempt to cover up regardless of his insomnia and ensuing confused state. This is suggested by Engstrom being more proactive than Dormer in his manipulation of evidence. He deliberately shoots the significantly living dog so as to be able to switch bullets, an act which would be considered more heinous in Hollywood than serial-killing, given the obligatory claimers stating that no animal was harmed in the making

of a film. Finally, it is he and not the killer who plants the gun in the hapless teenage suspect's apartment. By making Dormer more reactive than proactive, Nolan maintains audience sympathy while retaining an element of doubt in the spectator as to whether the shooting of Eckhart was an accident or not, allowing the film to maintain more tension in its resolution.

There is one instance in which Dormer is more proactive than Engstrom, which also allows Nolan's version of *Insomnia* to plug into standard generic formulas. In the original version, John Holt accidentally slips and drowns while being chased by Engstrom, whereas in Nolan's version Dormer shoots and kills Finch thus allowing the character to comply with generic norms of the action hero. Where Nolan does invert this generic norm is when Dormer and Finch shoot each other simultaneously. In Nolan's words, (see DVD package for Nolan's *Insomnia*), "Dormer and Finch are connected through this gesture.[50]" In having them shoot each other simultaneously Nolan has emphasised the similarities between the two characters, while allowing Pacino to have his redemption scene, whereas Skjoldbaerg's Engstrom, in the film's resolution, is allowed to get away with the crime, therefore suggesting that, unlike its American counterpart, it is not a film about justice.

Furthermore, there is a stronger similarity of sexual drive drawn between the detective and killer in the original version. The drive to the rubbish dump with the best friend of the murder victim becomes a game of sexual tension that Engstrom instigates and encourages. The hotel receptionist, played in Nolan's version by an attractive middle-aged woman who eventually becomes Dormer's non-sexual confidante, is in the original version played by a girl of roughly the same age as the murder victim and her best friend, whom Engstrom almost rapes. These details suggest that Skjoldbaerg is more interested in exploring the sexual similarities between Engstrom and Holt and thus the dangerous sex drive in the male as a theme than Nolan is. Nolan plays down this aspect of the original so that the spectator's sympathies remain with Dormer. Yet the elimination of the detective's sex drive as a theme may also have something to do with Nolan's apparent unwillingness to deal with human emotion, even in its most threatening form.

[50] This strengthens the notion of Finch as an *homme fatal* as proposed on page 36-7.

However, the most significant change for Nolan is in the relationship between Engstrom/Hagen and Dormer/Burr. In the original version Hagen is an experienced detective who, by filmic implication of looks and glances, is attracted to Engstrom. She eventually discovers that Engstrom killed his partner and presents Engstrom with the shell case as he leaves the town. Thus, she is as willing to conceal the truth as Engstrom in her manipulation of the evidence. Nolan has pitched the relationship at the level of male mentor and female acolyte, by making the female detective that much younger and more idealistic. Whether this change is to do with his unwillingness to depict such ambivalence or the studio thinking about audience demography is of course open to question.

One final way in which the two films differ is in the question of budget. By hiring two A-list actors of worldwide fame the film automatically moved into being a big budget film, since it can be assumed that their salaries commanded a significant proportion of the film's budget. When this is added to a number of set-piece action sequences, the film feels and looks bigger. The best example (and a scene for which there is no real analogue in the original) is the chase across the logjam involving Dormer and Finch. The chase in the original involves Holt getting on a bus and Engstrom giving chase in a car after being run over. Nolan cleverly references this scene by having Dormer and Finch spot each other by a bus stop but Finch, instead of getting on the bus, heads for the logjam.

In her commentary on the DVD package, screenwriter Hillary Seitz offers some interesting insights as to the genesis of the scene. She reveals that the scene was shot at the studio's insistence since the film was "dragging a bit" and implies that the studio is protecting its investment. Nolan and Seitz have been able to create a scene that is both visually exciting while adding another layer to Dormer's character. As Seitz says, "When Pacino falls through the logjam it becomes a metaphor for the city guy drowning and the fact that he is trapped under the logs is a great metaphor for what he is going through." How far the scene can be interpreted at a metaphorical level is debatable but since the screenwriter has done this, the metaphor will be extended in the last section of this chapter, in which the notion of space and time as expressed in *Insomnia* is examined.

## Time and Place in Global Insomnia

> "This is always the worst time of night for me. Too late for yesterday, too early for tomorrow."

So Finch addresses Dormer in the middle of the night (day) in one of his phone calls to the detective. In so doing he is mirroring the words of Jean Paul Sartre:

> Three o'clock. Three o'clock is always too late or too early for anything you want to do. A peculiar moment in the afternoon. Today it is intolerable.
>
> (*Nausea*, p 27)

What is paradoxical about Finch's statement is that when it is light 24 hours a day there is no night and as such no yesterday or tomorrow: only a continuous today. Time is merely now, without a specific frame of reference. Yesterday is a state of memory and tomorrow one of anticipation. Neither exists as a tangible entity and both implode on the timeless present, bringing the very concept of time into question:

> I believe our culture is indeed postmodern in this oxymoron-like manner as it transcends the notion of the present. It reaches back to the past and forward to the future trying to synthesise these two "imaginary places" in narrative fashion.
>
> (Degli-Esposti, 4)

If two imaginary places are fused in the present, as the present, then that is to suggest that the present itself does not exist, just as the term "postmodern" is paradoxical, since if the modern is now, how can we be after now, since to be after now is to be in an imaginary place. In that case the postmodern becomes an imaginary state, a fusion of nothing but its own hyper-reality. While the existential might be said to underpin the postmodern, society has moved on from that isolated, godless stance. Life in Nightmute[51] is a world without yesterday or tomorrow and becomes a metaphor for Marshall McLuhan's globe that is no more than a village. Dormer has problems adjusting to this situation because time no longer exists in Nightmute, everything is

[51] Nightmute in the film is referred to as a Halibut producing centre. However, the real Nightmute, which Nolan claims does not exist, actually is involved in the catching of Herring. Why make this change to a fictional town that is not fictional? Two reasons perhaps: 1) to reinforce the idea of an imaginary world. By taking a symbol which is close to reality, this actually emphasises the imaginary nature of it; 2) the halibut is a sole (pun intended) whereas the herring is a fish that swims in shoals.

always awake and the only sleep is death. Dormer and Finch are united by the fact that they have killed and cannot sleep. Sleep is for those with a clear conscience and neither Dormer nor Finch has a clear conscience. Finch has become that precursor of the *femme/homme fatal(e)* Lady Macbeth and Dormer has become Macbeth:

> Methought I heard a voice cry, "sleep no more,
> Macbeth does murder sleep"- the innocent sleep,
> Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleep of care.
>
> (Macbeth, ActII SceneII)

Dormer in particular has become unravelled, his loss of innocence expressed in his ever open eyes, his conscience clouded by doubt and increasing guilt. Tiredness leads him to hallucinate and affect his judgement. This is seen in a repeated scene of Dormer driving. The first time we see him driving towards an ongoing truck, he is with Tanya Francke, (Katherine Isabelle), breaking down her veneer of sophistication. He pulls out of the way of the truck just in time, his judgement of both when to swerve and its effect on the girl sound. The second time he swerves out of the way of an oncoming truck as he goes to rescue Burr, he again swerves just in time, but there is no truck there. It was a hallucination, his judgement impaired by his lack of sleep. He has entered an imaginary place, with Nightmute the setting for his dreamlike endgame with his doppelganger Finch.

Since the world does not sleep, through the technological advances that have reduced the world to monitor size, it can be interpreted as a world without a clear conscience. Yet so much of the technological world is also imaginary. So the modern filmmaker is forced to interact with this imaginary timeless place where we now live and find suitable strategies to reflect it in their work. Nolan has attempted this in *Insomnia*. He does this through location, editing and close up. These aspects of Nolan's work will now be discussed.

The setting of the film *Insomnia* in a town where the sun never sets works on two levels. Firstly, it works as a spotlight, seeking out and intensifying both Dormer's guilt and his heightened sense of existence. In the scene where he enters the police headquarters after about three non-nights of no sleep, he seems to experience sensory

enhancement rather than sensory deprivation. Nolan emphasises the sounds and colour, and uses jump cuts to personify the experience, both from the perspective of Dormer and, since the spectator experiences virtually the entire film from Dormer's point of view, for the spectator as well. Secondly, since Nightmute is a place with no yesterday or tomorrow it becomes both a timeless and imaginary place. While it is a specific location, which does (not) exist, it takes on further resonance, if we consider that Dormer comes from Los Angeles, which is both a city and the centre of American movie production. Nightmute acts as an allegory for the global city and Hollywood. It is, literally in Dormer's case, a city that never sleeps and thus a city that murders sleep, just as the modern city murders sleep. Within this analogy, Dormer becomes a reflection of Man within the global village: confused by time, morally uncertain and not in control of his own actions. In this timeless and imaginary place, which is both a construct of Dormer's imagination and a filmic construct reflecting the imaginary nature of all films, Nolan uses both flash flashbacks (so called because they are exceptionally short and seemingly bear no relation to the scene that precedes or proceeds them) and almost subliminal flashes, which can only be seen properly by using the slow motion button on the remote control of a video or DVD. While these are strategies he used in *Memento* to address questions of memory, here they are strategies that question the spectator's perspective of real time and space:

> A fragmented use of slow motion in films emphasises an expanded, segmented, and reconstructed perception of real time, now given excessive hyperbolic visibility through deconstruction.
>
> (Degli-Esposti, 7)

It is not only slow motion that achieves this "segmented perception of real time," Nolan's strategies also achieve it. Since the spectator is given no cues in dialogue, such as voiceover, or in camera technique, such as fadeout, as to when a flash flashback will come and no cues as to what is contained within the flash flashback either in terms of content or immediate purpose, they too become imaginary places. In the case of the subliminal flashbacks, they are non-places that cannot be seen in the real time of the film and perhaps even complete non-events, since it is not necessarily with the first viewing that they are seen if they are seen at all. Nolan is creating a work that I contend cannot be viewed completely in the cinema since the subliminal shots remain as mere traces, in the Derridian sense, flashes that seem to be imaginary. At the level of pure

business the inclusion of such subliminal shots have more to do with the renting and selling of different versions of the same product and can be seen as a marketing ploy to encourage people to rent or buy the DVD.

He also explores our perception of space in a similar way. The very first shot in *Insomnia* is of blood seeping through a piece of material. This is seen in extreme close up so that the spectator sees the individual strands of the piece of material as the blood seeps into them. The film then cuts to the outdoors of an Alaskan summer as the camera glides over glaciers. Here the shards of ice seem to mirror the structure of the fabric seen in the previous shot. Both shots fill the screen, that blank rectangle that is filled with colour and shape when the film starts. Yet neither can be seen with the naked eye unsupported by technology. One is a micro-space and the other a macro-space. Nolan has expanded the one and reduced the other so that the spectator will question how space is perceived. This is similar to the postmodern reaching backwards and forwards through time to try to synthesise both in the present. Nolan is doing the same thing but in a different dimension.

Space is expanding and contracting in the postmodern world. The so-called real world contracts to fill our TV screen, we can slow down or speed up the real world through the same medium. Space expands as we can see deeper and deeper into the human body with the aid of technology. In both cases however, expanded or contracted space is seen on screens through a two dimensional and rectangular medium, which ironically allows it to become a metaphor for the vast majority of modern culture: two dimensional and contained within sanitised boundaries. The medium of cinema can only ever be a reflection of the real world, a splintered version in the Lacanian sense, that emphasises our separation from it and reflects through the many shards, the many perspectives and echoes of the postmodern wor(l)d. Barthes' notion of "*déjà lu*", implying that all texts contain other texts, takes on a deeper resonance if we return it to the cliché that Barthes was playing with: *déjà vu*. When applied to the cinema the term now takes on that sense of strangeness that the true *déjà vu* is. Nolan's use of the flash suggests this sense of hallucinatory *déjà vu* both to Dormer and to the spectator: "Have I already seen this image or did I imagine I saw something?" Just as quickly as the image appears and disappears so does the feeling. It is this aspect of the film that can be considered postmodern and certainly the one that subverts most successfully the generic

conventions of the detective noir in Hollywood, while also allowing Nolan to maintain his reputation as a director with a strong personal and intellectual style.

# CONCLUSION

**Nolan and Noir**

Alain Silver wrote in 1992 in his essay "Son of Noir: Neo-Film Noir and the Neo-B Picture":

> The resurgence of interest in the themes and styles of film noir in recent years has benefited filmmakers at all budget levels. If film noir is no longer the American style, certainly no other movement has emerged to replace it. Unless and until filmmakers discover another mirror to hold up to American Society, none ever will.
>
> (Silver, 338)

While it has been argued that the 3rd cycle of noir began in 1992 with one of the films Silver discusses, *Reservoir Dogs*, he is being predictive in his comments concerning noir to the present date and the variously budgeted films of Nolan in particular. As has been argued noir has returned within the last ten years precisely because it is one of the genres most adept at reflecting paranoia over technological developments (cf. *Fight Club*, *Memento*) and the male's position in society (cf. *Lost Highway*, *Fight Club*, *Following*), while at the same time, paradoxically, employing such technological developments through fracturing narratives, repeated scenes and subliminal shots, in the full knowledge that any film made will invariably be viewed in a number of different formats and favourite scenes will be repeated with the help of the remote control. This array of media with which to view a film means that the contemporary filmmaker needs to find a genre robust enough to be able to withstand several viewings and offer more layered pleasures each time it is viewed. Film noir is such a genre, precisely because the fracturing of narrative through flashback and unreliable narrators allows the contemporary filmmaker to manipulate imagery and explore the troubled psychology of the protagonist, thus suggesting that a fractured psychological state is a condition of modern living.

Nolan himself has used the constraints of the various budgets on his feature films to create noir worlds that are coherent and identifiable as noir, while at the same time reworking recognisable noir tropes within a late 20th century context. His work can, however, be contrasted with the noir world of other 3rd cycle directors such as Fincher or Lynch, precisely because the palate he uses is one that hides the world in light rather than shadow. Daylight has thus become a metaphor for a world which never sleeps and where crime is possible at any time of day, in contrast with 1st cycle noir, where the

night was the natural setting for criminal activity, thus covering motive and budget restrictions in a blanket of shadows.

Furthermore, his strong sense of narrative structure and his interest in creating convoluting narratives that engage and then alienate the spectator mirror the narrative flexibility of the 1st cycle of noir. This structure also betrays his formalist concerns that are interested in narrative technique rather than any "moral" outcome. Of the protagonists in his three films only Al Pacino's Dormer can be said to have any degree of moral development, either due to Al Pacino's star persona or studio demands for a greater degree of moral closure. In this way Nolan's films explore stylistic and structural concerns far more successfully than they do humanist issues. To his detriment the very bravura of his narrative structure and his filmic grammar can be criticised as games playing. His films can thus be seen to replicate the moral hollowness of Leonard Shelby, whose surname is indicative of this emptiness. To give Nolan the benefit of the doubt, this hollowness can be interpreted as a critique of modern living, where surface is more important than individuality and depth.

It should not be forgotten, however, that Nolan has moved from entirely independent filmmaking to big studio pictures within the space of four years. That he has been prepared to make this move suggests that Nolan is, at bottom, a director who wants to make popular films and not films that appeal to a minority audience. That all his films are stories with a strong commercial potential cannot be denied, given the ease with which they have been accepted by the American film fraternity. This in turn suggests that Nolan himself is, and has always wanted to be, a commercial director, albeit one with a strong sense of individual style. The front cover of this thesis is a still taken from *Following* where Cobb explains his *Modus Operandi* of using surgical gloves to the Young Man. This image can now be seen to contain two allusions to Nolan's character. These gloves can be taken as an example of Nolan's surgical exactitude in his filming of people; it is their form and not their emotions which his camera dissects. Secondly, Nolan's ambition and individual style have taken him with almost clinical precision to Hollywood in the space of only four years.

This individual style can firstly be seen in his protagonists who are natural noir outsider figures. What makes them different from traditional noir protagonists is that, while

isolated, they are not tempted to commit criminal activities through their relationships with women. Rather it is the men they come into contact with that eventually lead to their downfall. While *Following* and *Memento* do have characters that can be identified as *femmes fatales*, it is Cobb and Teddy respectively who lead their protagonist's astray. This notion of the *homme fatal* is one that Nolan might use because in this way he does not have to focus on the human sexuality, which interests him about as much as it interests his characters, and concentrate more on what characters do to each other in a criminal setting. Furthermore, the *homme fatal* could just be the way the contemporary filmmaker addresses changes in male/female relationships: he downgrades their importance.

*Following*, the first of his feature-length films, shows the hand of Nolan in almost every shot and word spoken. Since the film was scripted, shot, directed, co-produced and edited by him, this is not surprising. Any creative or thematic interests he has are certainly present in this film and as a result of the control he exercises over the film we can have a clear idea of he believes these themes should be expressed as well as the way in which he believes stories should be told through film. However, whether as a result of budget restrictions, limited acting ability of the three main players or Nolan's inexperience, it is actually the least successful of Nolan's films in its treatment of the themes of isolation and paranoia. While unusual in its narrative structure, this very structure is awkwardly contrived in the way in which it forces the spectator to reorder the events of the story, which, when reordered from their convolutions, add little to the theme of isolation. Nolan himself has attested that the script is too neat in its conclusion.

This theme of the solitary male experiencing paranoid crisis is handled far more effectively in *Memento.* The reasons for this are various. Firstly, the premise of a man with no short-term memory is an idea with more dramatic potential[52] than a man following people for no reason other than the loose one of his research for a novel that

[52] It would seem that the success of *Memento* has started something of a trend in Hollywood. Both *Finding Nemo* (2003) and *50 First Dates* (2004) have characters suffering from amnesia. The idea is more clearly defined in *50 First Dates*, a romantic comedy starring Adam Sandler and Drew Barrymore, where Barrymore is a character with no short-term memory who Sandler is trying to woo. However, both films involve specifically female characters suffering from amnesia. Is this a form of crass stereotyping or is it a more insidious attempt to reaffirm strong male values by suggesting women have forgotten about feminism?

remains unwritten. Secondly, the idea of the amnesiac has noir antecedents (cf. *Deadline at Dawn* (1946), *The Crooked Way* (1949), *Somewhere in the Night* (1946)[53]) thus allowing Nolan to re-examine the technical complexities of the amnesiac's life. Furthermore, the fractured narrative gives the spectator a far more realistic psychological profile of Leonard; the narrative structure of *Memento* is a case of form reflecting content, which also allows the film to question spectatorial processes of remembering.

While *Memento* uses a fractured narrative to create a metaphor for the process of memory creation, *Insomnia* resorts to relating the events of the narrative in a straightforward chronological fashion and only uses ellipsis in the filmic grammar in its unconventional use of flashbacks and quasi-subliminal inserts. While the narrative structure may be considered traditional in its cause and effect process on the way to its denouement, Nolan is able to give resonance to the dimension of space, through intercutting extreme close ups with extreme long shots as can be seen in the opening sequence of the film. Furthermore, aesthetically, they remain the most visually satisfying scenes of his films to date, suggesting for the first time that here is a cerebral filmmaker who can also film for both visually satisfying images and metaphorical resonance. It remains to be seen of course if Nolan's aesthetic sense is extended to building the emotional level of his characters, and if he will use his camera and framing to suggest states other than paranoia, claustrophobia and isolation.

With only three feature films to his name, it is too early to tell if Nolan is a director of vision or if he is, regardless of how complex that trick is, a one trick pony: a director only capable of exploring the isolated male in a film noir environment. How far Nolan's empathy with this type of protagonist and the narrative situations he places them in is a reflection of Nolan's own personality remains open to question. It is to be hoped that future films by Christopher Nolan will embrace other genres and methods of storytelling with an aim to making thought-provoking films which tell the stories of interesting and well-rounded characters in challenging and original settings. If we consider that his next film *Batman: Intimidation*, takes an isolated character, Bruce

[53] It should be noted that all three of these films involve servicemen returning from the Second World War and suffering from amnesia. The connection between the two clearly indicates a metaphorical reading of a society traumatised and wanting to forget the war.

Wayne, gives him a false identity, Batman, and pits him against crime figures in a potential noir environment, then this seems unlikely for the while. The one-word title *Intimidation* sounds like a Christopher Nolan film, while the *Batman* element of the title is necessarily a studio-driven franchise. Whether the studio or Nolan predominates in the battle for supremacy over the finished product is probably just as predictable in outcome as the expected ultimate defeat of the criminal figure in the film itself.

As this thesis has progressed a number of ideas have arisen that appear to be worth further investigation. An area that should be of interest is the relationship between how film technology is developed and depicted by Hollywood in the 21st century and if there is a depiction of the pervasiveness and dehumanising tendency of technology by those filmmakers sceptical enough to offer a mature questioning of the promise of progress. Another area that should be of interest is how far the emergence of the figure of the *homme fatal* is a viable term to describe the Othello/Iago- like relationship that the male protagonist and his criminal counterpart share, particularly in 3rd cycle noir. If it is a term that can be seen to be valid to describe a body of films beyond the ones mentioned in this thesis, then the reasons for its appearance need to be explored and defined as far as possible. One of these might be the perceived political incorrectness of using women in their traditional role of the scapegoat responsible for the powerful and uncontrollable feelings welling up in the male.

Finally, a more thorough examination of the 3 cycles of noir as suggested in this thesis could be undertaken, firstly to see if the idea of cycles can be applied as clearly defined periods to the films made within any given time and, secondly, to see if there is indeed a clear metaphorical intent within the noir world being depicted. In other words, do the filmmakers of any given cycle of noir share common perspectives on the socio-political environment within which they find themselves? However, I feel that this particular aspect of future research, while of academic worth, will prove to be a thankless task since film noir is adept at evading definition, unlike its protagonists who inevitably get caught in the insidiousness that is film noir.

## FILMOGRAPHY

**Christopher Nolan Filmography**

***DOODLEBUG*** (Pre-1998)

Length: two minutes 55 seconds
UK DVD Release - Momac Films (5th May 2003)

**CREDITS**

THE MEN – Jeremy Theobald
SPECIAL EFFECTS – Ivan Cornell
MUSIC – David Julyan
SOUND – David Lloyd
DESIGN – Alberto Matuissi/Christopher Nolan
PRODUCTION – Emma Thomas/Steve Street
GRIP – Jonathon Nolan
WRITTEN, DIRECTED, SHOT AND EDITED- Christopher Nolan
Thanks to UCL Film Society

***FOLLOWING*** (1998)

Length: 69 min.
American Release – Zeitgeist Films (2nd April 1999)

## CREDITS

## MAIN CAST

THE YOUNG MAN – Jeremy Theobald
COBB – Alex Haw
THE BLONDE – Lucy Russell
THE POLICEMAN – John Nolan
THE BALD GUY – Dick Bradsell
THE HOMEOWNER – Gillian El-Kadi
THE WAITRESS – Jennifer Angel
BARMAN – Nicholas Carlotti
ACCOUNTANT - Darren Ormandy
Heavy #1 – Guy Greenway
Heavy #2 - Tassos Stevens
MAN AT BAR – Tristan Martin
WOMAN AT BAR – Rebecca James
HOMEOWNER'S HUSBAND – Pail Mason
HOMEOWNER'S FRIEND – David Bovill

## MAIN CREW

Directed by – Christopher Nolan
Written by – Christopher Nolan
Produced by – Christopher Nolan, Jeremy Theobald, Emma Thomas
Original Music by – David Julyan
Cinematography by – Christopher Nolan
Film Editing by – Gareth Heal, Christopher Nolan
Production Design by – Tristan Martin
Sound / Sound Designer / Lighting – Ivan Cornell
Sound / Sound Designer – James Wheeler
Lighting – Barbara Stepansky

***MEMENTO*** (2000)

Length: 116 min.
Produced by: Newmarket / Summit Entertainment / Team Todd
American Release – Union Generale Cinematographique (16th March 2001)

## CAST

LEONARD – Guy Pearce
NATALIE – Carrie-Anne Moss
TEDDY – Joe Pantoliano
BURT – Mark Boone, Jr.
SAMMY – Stephen Tobolowsky
MRS JANKIS – Harriet Sansom Harris
DODD – Callum Keith Rennie
DOCTOR – Thomas Lennon
JIMMY – Russ Fega
CATHERINE SHELBY – Jorja Fox

## PRODUCTION CREDITS

Director / Screenwriter – Christopher Nolan
Producer – Jennifer Todd
Producer – Suzanne Todd
Screen Story – Jonathon Nolan
Cinematographer – Wally Pfister
Composer (Music Score) – David Julyan
Editor – Doddy Dorn
Production Designer – Patti Podesta
Co-producer – Elaine Dysinger
Associate Producer – Emma Thomas
Set Designer – Danielle Berman
Costume Designer – Cindy Evans
Sound / Sound Designer – William Fiege
Casting – John Papsidera

***INSOMNIA*** (2002)

Length: 118 min.
Produced by: Alcon Entertainment / Section Eight / Witt-Thomas Films
American Release – Warner Bros. (24th May 2002)

## CAST

Will Dormer – Al Pacino
Walter Finch – Robin Williams
Ellie Burr – Hilary Swank
Rachel Clement – Maura Tierney
Hap Eckhart – Martin Donovan
Fred Duggar – Nicky Katt
Chief Charles Nyback – Paul Dooley
Farrell – Larry Holden
Tanya Francke – Katherine Isabelle
Woman on the Road – Kate Robbins
Trish Eckhart – Kerry Sandomirsky
Ticket Taker – Dean Wray
Warfield – Ian Tracey
Coroner – Paula Shaw
Mrs. Connell – Tasha Simms
Pilot – Oliver "Ole" Zemen
Officer #2 – Andrew Campbell
Rich – Lorne Cardinal
Francis – Jay Brazeau
Principal – Malcom Boddington
Girl at Funeral – Emily Perkins
Stunt Coordinator – Ken Kirzinger
Kay Connell – Crystal Lowe
Uniformed Officer – Chris Guthior
Randy Stetz – Jonathan Jackson
Officer #1 – James Hutson

## PRODUCTION CREDITS

Director - Christopher Nolan
Producer - Broderick Johnson
Producer - Andrew Kosove
Producer - Edward L. McDonnell
Producer / Co-producer - Emma Thomas
Producer - Paul Junger Witt
Screenwriter - Hillary Seitz
Cinematographer - Wally Pfister
Composer (Music Score) - David Julyan
Editor - Dody Dern
Production Designer - Nathan Crowley
Art Director - Michael Diner

Associate Producer - Ben Cosgrove
Associate Producer - Steven P. Wegner
Executive Producer - George Clooney
Executive Producer - Kim Roth
Executive Producer - Charles Schlissel
Executive Producer - Steven Soderbergh
Executive Producer - Tony Thomas

## GENERAL FILMOGRAPHY

*A Bout de Souffle*
France 1960 90m
Production Credit : SNC (Georges de Beauregard)
Director : Jean Luc Godard
Starring : Jean-Paul Belmondo, Jean Seberg

*The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*
Australia 1994 103m
Production Credit: Rank/Polygram/AFFC/Latent Image/Specific Films (Al Clark Michael Hamlyn)
Director: Stephan Elliott
Starring: Terence Stamp, Hugo Weaving, Guy Pearce

*Aladdin*
US 1992 90m
Production Credit: Buena Vista/Walt Disney (John Musker, Ron Clements)
Director: Ron Clements, John Musker
Starring: (voices) Scott Weinger, Robin Williams, Linda Larkin

*Basic Instinct*
US 1991 128m
Production Credit: Guild/Carolco/Canal (Alan Marshall
Director: Paul Verhoeven
Starring: Michael Douglas, Sharon Stone, George Dzundza

*Batman: Intimidation*
US To be announced ???
Production Credit: Warner Bros (Emma Thomas, Benjamin Melniker, Michael E. Uslan)
Director: Christopher Nolan
Starring: Christian Bale, Michael Caine

*The Big Heat*
US 1953 90m
Production Credit: Columbia (Robert Arthur)
Director: Fritz Lang
Starring: Glenn Ford, Gloria Grahame, Lee Marvin

*The Big Sleep*
US 1946 114m
Production Credit: Warner (Howard Hawks)
Director: Howard Hawks
Starring: Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall, John Ridgley, Martha Vickers

*The Big Sleep*
GB 1977 99m
Production Credit: Winkast (Elliot Kastner, Michael Winner)
Director: Michael Winner
Starring: Robert Mitchum, Sarah Miles, Richard Boone

*Blade Runner*
US 1982 117m
Production Credit: Warner/Ladd/Blade Runner Partnership (Michael Deeley, Ridley Scott)
Director: Ridley Scott
Starring: Harrison Ford, Rutger Hauer, Sean Young, Daryl Hannah

*The Blair Witch Project*
US 1998 81m
Production Credit: Pathé/Haxan (Gregg Hale, Robin Cowie)
Director: Daniel Myrick, Eduardo Sanchez
Starring: Heather Donahue, Michael Williams, Joshua Leonard

*Blood Simple*
US 1983 99m
Production Credit: Palace/River Road (Ethan Coen)
Director: Joel Coen
Starring: John Getz, Frances McDormand, Dan Hedaya

*The Blue Dahlia*
US 1946 99m
Production Credit: Paramount (John Houseman)
Director: George Marshall
Starring: Alan Ladd, Veronica Lake, William Bendix

*Blue Velvet*
US 1986 120m
Production Credit: De Laurentis (Richard Roth)
Director: David Lynch
Starring: Kyle MacLachlan, Isabella Rossellini, Dennis Hopper, Laura Dern

*Body Double*
US 1984 114m
Production Credit: Columbia/Delphi II (Brian de Palma)
Director: Brian de Palma
Starring: Craig Wasson, Gregg Henry, Melanie Griffith

*Body Heat*
US 1981 113m
Production Credit: Warner/Ladd (Fred T. Gallo)
Director: Lawrence Kasdan
Starring: William Hurt, Kathleen Turner, Richard Crenna, Ted Hanson

*Boys Don't Cry*
US 1999 118m
Production Credit: Jeffrey Sharp, John Hart, Eva Kolodner, Christine Vachon
Director: Kimberly Pierce
Starring: Hilary Swank, Chloe Sevigny, Peter Sarsgaard

*Chinatown*
US 1974 131m
Production Credit: Paramount/Long Road (Robert Evans)
Director: Roman Polanski
Starring: Jack Nicholson, Faye Dunaway, John Huston, Roman Polanski

*Citizen Kane*
US 1941 119m
Production Credit: RKO (Orson Welles)
Director: Orson Welles
Starring: Orson Welles, Joseph Cotton, Dorothy Comingore

*The Crooked Way*
US 1949 87m
Production Credit: Benedict Bogeaus
Director: Robert Florey
Starring: John Payne, Sonny Tufts, Ellen Drew

*Dance With A Stranger*
GB 1985 101m
Production Credit: Goldcrest/NFFC/First Picture Co (Roger Randall-Cutler)
Director: Mike Newell
Starring: Miranda Richardson, Rupert Everett, Ian Holm

*Dark Passage*
US 1947 106m
Production Credit: Warner (Jerry Wald)
Director: Delmar Daves
Starring: Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall, Agnes Moorehead, Bruce Bennett

*Dead Again*
US 1991 108m
Production Credit: UIP/Paramount/Mirage (Lindsay Doran, Charles H. Maguire)
Director: Kenneth Branagh
Starring: Kenneth Branagh, Emma Thompson, Andy Garcia, Derek Jacobi

*Deadline at Dawn*
US 1946 83m
Production Credit: RKO (Adrian Scott)
Director: Harold Churman
Starring: Susan Hayward, Bill Williams, Paul Lukas

*Dead Poets Society*
US 1989 129m
Production Credit: Warner/Touchstone/Silver Screen Partners IV/Witt-Thomas Productions (Steven Haft, Paul Junger-Witt, Tony Thomas)
Director: Peter Weir
Starring: Robin Williams, Robert Sean Leonard, Ethan Hawke

*Death to Smoochy*
US 2002 109m
Production Credit: Warner (Andrew Lazar, Peter MacGregor Scott)
Director: Danny DeVito
Starring: Robin Williams, Edward Norton, Catherine Keener

*The Devil's Advocate*
US 1997 144m
Production Credit: Warner (Arnon Milchan, Arnold Kopelson, Anne Kopelson)
Director: Taylor Hackford
Starring: Keanu Reaves, Al Pacino, Charlize Theron)

*Disclosure*
US 1994 127m
Production Credit: Warner/Baltimore/Constant (Barry Levinson, Michael Crichton)
Director: Barry Levinson
Starring: Michael Douglas, Demi Moore, Donald Sutherland

*Don't Look Back*
US 1967 96m
Production Credit: Albert Grossman
Director: D. A. Pennebaker
Starring: Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Donnovan,

*Double Indemnity*
US 1944 107m
Production Credit: Paramount (Joseph Sistrom)
Director: Billy Wilder
Starring: Fred MacMurray, Barbara Stanwyck, Edward G. Robinson

*Easy Rider*
US 1969 94m
Production Credit: Columbia/Pando/Raybert (Peter Fonda)
Director: Dennis Hopper
Starring: Peter Fonda, Dennis Hopper, Jack Nicholson

*E.T. The Extraterrestrial*
US 1982 115m
Production Credit: Universal (Steven Spielberg, Kathleen Kennedy)
Director: Stephen Spielberg
Starring: Dee Wallace, Henry Thomas, Peter Coyote

*Farewell My Lovely*
US 1975 95m
Production Credit: Avco Embassy/Elliot Kastner/ITC (George Pappas, Jerry Bruckheimer)
Director: Dick Richards
Starring: Robert Mitchum, Charlotte Rampling, John Ireland

*Fargo*
US 1996 98m
Production Credit: Polygram/Working Title (Ethan Coen)
Director: Joel Coen
Starring: Frances McDormand, William H. Macy, Steve Buscemi

*50 First Dates*
US 2004 106m
Production Credits: Columbia Pictures Corporation (Scott Bankston, Allen Covert, Michael Ewing)
Director: Peter Segal
Starring: Adam Sandler, Drew Barrymore

*Fight Club*
US 1999 139m
Production Credit: TCF/Fox 2000/Regency (Art Linson, Cean Chaffin, Ross Grayson Bell)
Director: David Fincher
Starring: Edward Norton, Brad Pitt, Helena Bonham Carter

*Final Analysis*
US 1992 124m
Production Credit: Warner/Roven-Cavallo (Charles Roven, Paul Junger Witt, Anthony Thomas)
Director: Phil Joanou
Starring: Richard Gere, Kim Basinger, Uma Thurman

*Finding Nemo*
US 2003 100m
Production Credits: Pixar Animation/Walt Disney Pictures (Jinko Gotoh, John Lasseter, Graham Walters)
Director: Andrew Stanton, Lee Unkrich
Starring: (Voices) Albert Brooks, Ellen DeGeneres, Alexander Gould

*The Game*
US 1997 128m
Production Credit: Polygram/Propaganda (Steve Golin, Cean Chaffin)
Director: David Fincher
Starring: Michael Douglas, Sean Penn, Deborah Kara Unger

*Get Carter*
GB 1971 112m
Production Credit: MGM/Mike Klinger
Director: Mike Hodges
Starring: Michael Caine, John Osborne, Ian Hendry, Britt Ekland

*The Godfather*
US 1972 175m
Production Credit: Paramount/Alfran (Albert S. Ruddy)
Director: Francis Ford Coppola
Starring: Marlon Brando, Al Pacino, Robert Duvall

*The Godfather Part II*
US 1974 200m
Production Credit: Paramount/The Coppola Company (Francis Ford Coppola)
Director: Francis Ford Coppola
Starring: Al Pacino, Robert De Niro, Diane Keaton

*The Godfather Part III*
US 1990 161m
Production Credit: Paramount/Zoetrope (Francis Ford Coppola)
Director: Francis Ford Coppola
Starring: Al Pacino, Diane Keaton, Talia Shire

*Good Morning Vietnam*
US 1987 120m
Production Credit: Touchstone (Mark Johnson, Larry Brezner)
Director: Barry Levinson
Starring: Robin Williams, Forest Whitaker, Tung Thanh Tran

*Good Will Hunting*
US 1997 126m
Production Credit: Miramax (Lawrence Bender)
Director: Gus Van Sant
Starring: Matt Damon, Robin Williams, Ben Affleck

*The Grifters*
US 1990 110m
Production Credit: Palace/Cineplex Odeon (Martin Scorsese, Robert Harris)
Director: Stephen Frears
Starring: Anjelica Huston, John Kusack, Annette Bening

*Gun Crazy*
US 1992 93m
Production Credit: Zeta/First Look (Zane W. Levitt, Diane Firestone)
Director: Tamra Davis
Starring: Drew Barrymore, James LeGros, Billy Drago

*Heat*
US 1995 172m
Production Credit: Warner/Monarchy/Forward Pass/Regency (Michael Mann, Art Linson)
Director: Michael Mann
Starring: Al Pacino, Robert De Niro, Jon Voight

*High School*
US 1968 75m
Production Credit: Fredrick Wiseman
Director: Frederick Wiseman
Starring: Non-Actors

*Insomnia*
Norway 1997 99m
Production Credit: Norsk Film/Nordic Screen (Petter J. Borgli, Tomas Backstrom, Tom Remlov)
Director: Erik Skjoldbaerg
Starring: Stellan Skarsgard, Sverre Anker Ousdal, Bjorn Floberg

*Invasion of the Body Snatchers*
US 1955 80m
Production Credit: Allied Artists/Walter Wanger
Director: Don Siegel
Starring: Kevin McCarthy, Dana Wynter, Larry Gates

*Jack*
US 1996 113m
Production Credit: Buena Vista/Hollywood/American Zoetrope/Great Oaks (Ricardo Mestres, Fred Fuchs, Francis Ford Coppola)
Director: Francis Ford Copola
Starring: Robin Williams, Diane Lane, Jennifer Lopez

*Jackie Brown*
US 1997 155m
Production Credit: Buena Vista/Miramax/ A Band Apart (Lawrence Bender)
Director: Quentin Tarantino
Starring: Pan Grier, Samuel L. Jackson, Robert Forster, Brigit Fonda, Robert De Niro

*Jagged Edge*
US 1985 108m
Production Credit: Columbia/Martin Ransohoff
Director: Richard Marquand
Starring: Jeff Bridges, Glenn Close, Peter Coyote

*King Kong*
US 1976 135m
Production Credit: Dino de Laurentis
Director: John Guillermin
Starring: Jeff Bridges, Charles Grodin, Jessica Lange

*Kiss Me Deadly*
US 1955 105m
Production Credit: UA/Parklane (Robert Aldrich)
Director: Robert Aldrich
Starring: Ralph Meeker, Albert Dekker, Cloris Leachman

*Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye*
US 1950 102m
Production Credit: Cagney Productions (William Cagney)
Director: Gordon Douglas
Starring: James Cagney, Barbara Payton, Ward Bond

*Klute*
Us 1971 114m
Production Credit: Warner (Alan J. Pakula)
Director: Alan J. Pakula
Starring: Jane Fonda, Donald Sutherland, Charles Cioffi

*The Krays*
GB 1990 119m
Production Credit: Rank/Parkfield (Dominic Anciano, Ray Burdis)
Director: Peter Medak
Starring: Billie Whitelaw, Gary Kemp, Martin Kemp

*L.A Confidential*
US 1997 136m
Production Credit: Warner/Regency (Arnon Milchan, Curtis Hanson, Michael Nathanson)
Director: Curtis Hanson
Starring: Kevin Spacey, Russell Crowe, Kim Basinger, Guy Pearce, Danny DeVito, James Cromwell

*The Lady from Shanghai*
US 1948 82m
Production Credit: Columbia (Richard Wilson, William Castle)
Director: Orson Welles
Starring: Orson Welles, Rita Hayworth, Everett Sloane

*The Last Seduction*
US 1994 110m
Production Credit: ITC (Jonathon Shestack)
Director: John Dahl
Starring: Linda Fiorentino, Peter Berg, J.T. Walsh

*Laura*
US 1994 85m
Production Credit: TCF (Otto Preminger)
Director: Otto Preminger
Starring: Dana Andrews, Clifton Webb, Gene Tierney

*The Limey*
US 1999 90m
Production Credit: Artisan (John Hardy, Scott Kramer
Director: Steven Soderbergh
Starring: Terence Stamp, Peter Fonda, Lesley Anne Warren

*Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*
GB 1998 95m
Production Credit: Polygram/Steve Tisch/SKA Films (Matthew Vaughan)
Director: Guy Ritchie
Starring: Jason Flemyng, Dexter Fletcher, Nick Moran

*The Long Goodbye*
US 1973 111m
Production Credit: UA/Lions Gate (Jerry Bick)
Director: Robert Altman
Starring: Elliott Gould, Nina Van Pallandt, Sterling Hayden

*The Long Good Friday*
GB 1980 105m
Production Credit: Black Lion/Calendar (Barry Hanson)
Director: John Mackenzie
Starring: Bob Hoskins, Helen Mirren, Dave King

*Lost Highway*
US 1996 134m
Production Credit: Polygram/CiBY 2000/Asymetrical (Deepak Nayar, Tom Sternberg, Mary Sweeney)
Director: David Lynch
Starring: Bill Pullman, Patricia Arquette, Gregson Wagner

*Love Crimes*
US 1991 90m
Production Credit: Rank/Sovereign/Miramax (Lizzie Borden, Rudy Langlais)
Director: Lizzie Borden
Starring: Sean Young, Patrick Bergin, Arnetia Walker

*The Maltese Falcon*
US 1941 101m
Production Credit: Warner (Henry Blanke)
Director: John Huston
Starring: Humphrey Bogart, Mary Astor, Peter Lorre, Sydney Greenstreet

*Manhunter*
US 1986 120m
Production Credit: Recorded Releasing/Red Dragon/De Laurentis Entertainment (Richard Roth)
Director: Michael Mann
Starring: William L. Peterson, Kim Greist, Joan Allen

*The Man Who Wasn't There*
US 2002 115m
Production Credit: Ethan Coen
Director: Ethan Coen
Starring: Billy Bob Thornton, Frances McDormand, Michael Badalucco

*Marlowe*
US 1969 95m
Production Credit: MGM (Gabriel Katzka, Sidney Beckerman)
Director: Paul Bogart
Starring: James Garner, Rita Moreno, Sharon Farrell

*Medium Cool*
US 1969 111m
Production Credit: Paramount/H & J Pictures (Tully Friedman)
Director: Hashell Wexler
Starring: Robert Forster, Verna Bloom, Peter Bonerz

*Mildred Pierce*
US 1945 113m
Production Credit: Warner (Jerry Wald)
Director: Michael Curtiz
Starring: Joan Crawford, Jack Carson, Zachary Scott, Eve Arden

*Mrs Doubtfire*
US 1993 125m
Production Credit: TCF/Blue Wolf (Marcia Garces Williams, Robin Williams, Mark Radcliffe)
Director: Chris Columbus
Starring: Robin Williams, Sally Field, Pierce Brosnan

*Murder My Sweet*
US 1944 95m
Production Credit: RKO (Adrian Scott)
Director: Edward Dmytryk
Starring: Dick Powell, Claire Trevor, Anne Shirley

*The Naked City*
US 1948 96m
Production Credit: Universal (Mark Hellinger)
Director: Milton Schwarzwald
Starring: Barry Fitzgerald, Don Taylor, Howard Duff

*One Hour Photo*
US 2002 98m
Production Credit: Fox Searchlight/Catch 23 Entertainment/Killer Films/Laughlin Park Pictures
Director: Mark Romanek
Starring: Robin Williams, Connie Nielson, Michael Vartan

*Out of the Past*
US 1947 97m
Production Credit: RKO (Warren Duff)
Director: Jacques Tourneur
Starring: Robert Mitchum, Jane Greer, Kirk Douglas

*Peeping Tom*
GB 1959 109m
Production Credit: Anglo Amalgamated/Michael Powell
Director: Michael Powell
Starring: Carl Boehm, Moira Shearer, Anna Massey

*Pi*
US 1998 85m
Production Credit: Live Entertainment/Truth & Soul/Harvest/Plantain/Protozoa (Eric Watson)
Director: Darren Aronofsky
Starring: Sean Gullette, Mark Margolis, Ben Shenkman

*The Player*
US 1992 124m
Production Credit: Guild/Avenue (David Brown, Michael Tolkin, Nick Wechsler
Director: Robert Altman
Starring: Tim Robbins, Greta Scacchi, Fred Ward

*Point Blank*
US 1967 92m
Production Credit: MGM/Judd Bernard, Irwin Winkler
Director: John Boorman
Starring: Lee Marvin, Angie Dickinson, Keenan Wynn

*Poor Cow*
GB 1967 101m
Production Credit: Anglo Amalgamated/Vic Fenchurch (Joe Janni)
Director: Ken Loach
Starring: Carol White, Terence Stamp, John Bindon

*The Postman Always Rings Twice*
US 1946 113m
Production Credit: MGM (Carey Wilson)
Director: Tay Garnett
Starring: Lana Turner, John Garfield, Cecil Kellaway

*The Postman Always Rings Twice*
US 1981 121m
Production Credit: Lorimar/Northstar International (Charles Mulvehill, Bob Rafelson
Director: Bob Rafelson
Starring: Jack Nicholson, Jessica Lange, John Colicos

*The Professional*
France 1994 110m
Production Credit: Buena Vista/Gaumont/Dauphin (Luc Besson)
Director: Luc Besson
Starring: Jean Reno, Gary Oldman, Natalie Portman

*Psycho*
US 1960 109m
Production Credit: Shamley/Alfred Hitchcock
Director: Alfred Hitchcock
Starring: Anthony Perkins, Vera Miles, John Gavin, Janet Leigh

*Psycho*
US 1998 104m
Production Credit: Universal/Imagine (Brian Grazer, Gus Van Sant
Director: Gus Van Sant
Starring: Vince Vaughn, Julianne Moore, Viggo Mortenson

*Pulp Fiction*
US 1994 153m
Production Credit: Buena Vista/Miramax/A Band Apart/Jersey (Lawrence Bender)
Director: Quentin Tarantino
Starring: John Travolta, Samuel L. Jackson, Uma Thurman,

*Red Rock West*
US 1992 98m
Production Credit: Rank/Red Rock (Sigurjon Sighvatsson, Steve Golin
Director: John Dahl
Starring: Nicholas Cage, Lara Flynn Boyle, Dennis Hopper

*Reservoir Dogs*
US 1992 99m
Production credit: Rank/Live America/Dog Eat Dog (Lawrence Bender)
Director: Quentin Tarantino
Starring: Harvey Keitel, Tim Roth, Michael Madson

*The Rookie*
US 1990 121m
Production Credit: Warner/Malpaso (Howard Kazanijan, Steven Siebert, David Valdes)
Director: Clint Eastwood
Starring: Clint Eastwood, Charlie Sheen, Raul Julia

*Rope*
US 1948 80m
Production Credit: Transatlantic (Sidney Bernstein, Alfred Hitchcock
Director: Alfred Hitchcock
Starring: James Stewart, John Dall, Farley Granger

*Serpico*
US 1973 130m
Production Credit: Paramount/Artists Entertainment
Director: Sidney Lumet
Starring: Al Pacino, John Randolph, Jack Kehoe

*Se7en*
US 1995 127m
Production Credit: Entertainment/New Line (Arnold Kopelson, Phyliss Carlyle)
Director: David Fincher
Starring: Brad Pitt, Morgan Freeman, Kevin Spacey

*Shamus*
US 1972 98m
Production Credit: Columbia/Robert M. Weitman
Director: Buzz Kulik
Starring: Burt Reynolds, Dyan Cannon, John Ryan

*The Silence of the Lambs*
US 1990 118m
Production Credit: Rank/Orion/Strong Heart/Demme (Edward Saxon, Kenneth Utt, Ron Bozman)
Director: Jonathon Demme
Starring: Jodie Foster, Anthony Hopkins, Scott Glenn

*Somewhere in the Night*
US 1946 111m
Production Credit: TCF (Anderson Lawler)
Director: Joseph L. Mankiewicz
Starring: John Hodiak, Nancy Guild, Lloyd Nolan

*Star Wars*
US 1977 121m
Production Credit: TCF/Lucasfilm (Gary Kurtz)
Director: George Lucas
Starring: Mark Hamill, Harrison Ford, Carrie Fisher, Peter Cushing, Alec Guinness

*Stranger on the 3rd Floor*
US 1940 64m
Production Credit: RKO (Lee Marcus)
Director: Boris Ingster
Starring: Margaret Tallichet, Peter Lorre, John McGuire

*Sunset Boulevard*
US 1950 110m
Production Credit: Paramount (Charles Brackett)
Director: Billy Wilder
Starring: Gloria Swanson, William Holden, Erich von Stroheim

*Taxi Driver*
US 1976 114m
Production Credit: Columbia/Italo-Judeo (Michael and Julia Philips)
Director: Martin Scorsese
Starring: Robert De Niro, Jody Foster, Cybill Shepherd, Harvey Keitel

*Thief*
US 1981 123m
Production Credit: United Artists/Michael Mann/Caan Productions
Director: Michael Mann
Starring: James Can, Tuesday Weld, Willie Nelson

*The Third Man*
GB 1949 100m
Production Credit: British Lion/London Films/David O. Selznick/Alexander Korda (Carol Reed)
Director: Carol Reed
Starring: Joseph Cotton, Trevor Howard, Orson Welles

*Titanic*
US 1997 194m
Production Credit: TCF/Lightstorm (James Cameron, Jon Landau)
Director: James Cameron
Starring: Leonardo DiCaprio, Kate Winslet, Billy Zane

*Touch of Evil*
US 1958 95m
Production Credit: U-I (Albert Zugsmith)
Director: Orson Welles
Starring: Charlton Heston, Orson Welles, Janet Leigh

*Under Capricorn*
GB 1949 117m
Production Credit: Transatlantic (Sidney Bernstein, Alfred Hitchcock)
Director: Alfred Hitchcock
Starring: Ingrid Bergman, Joseph Cotton, Michael Wilding

*The Usual Suspects*
US 1995 105m
Production Credit: Polygram/Spelling/Blue Parrot/Bad Hat Harry/Rosco (Bryan Singer, Michael McDonnell)
Director: Bryan Singer
Starring: Gabriel Byrne, Stephen Baldwin, Kevin Spacey

*Vertigo*
US 1958 128m
Production Credit: Paramount (Alfred Hitchcock)
Director: Alfred Hitchcock
Starring: James Stewart, Kim Novak, Barbara Bel

*Waterworld*
US 1995 135m
Production Credit: UIP/Universal (Charles Gordon, John Davis, Kevin Costner)
Director: Kevin Reynolds
Starring: Kevin Costner, Dennis Hopper, Jeanne Tripplehorn

*The Wedding Banquet*
Taiwan/US 1993 108m
Production Credit: Mainline/Central Motion Picture/Good Machine (Ang Lee, Ted Hope, James Schamus)
Director: Ang Lee
Starring: Mitchell Lichtenstein, Winston Chao, May Chin

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